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Faith in Action for Social Justice

Dismantling the 'New Jim Crow'

What it will take to cure America's addiction to mass incarceration.

by MICHELLE ALEXANDER



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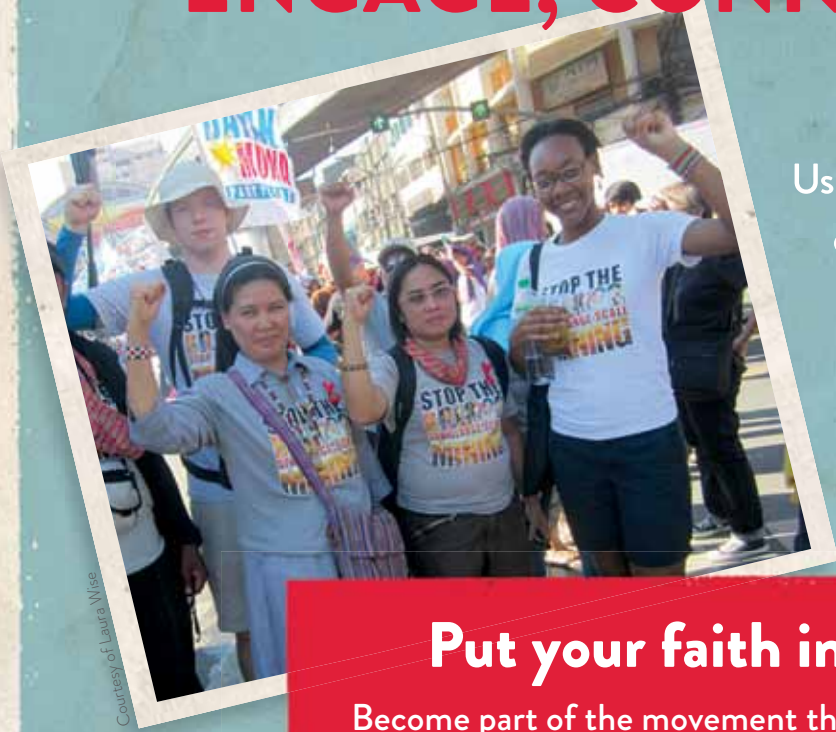
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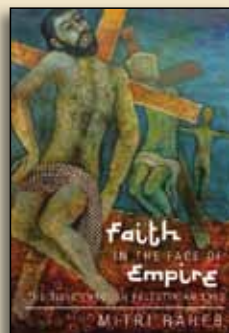
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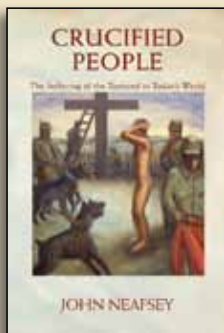
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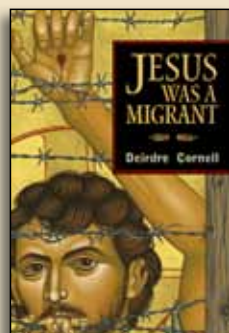
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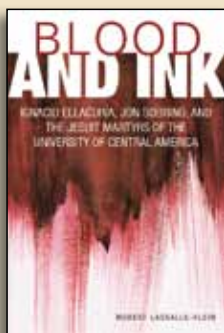


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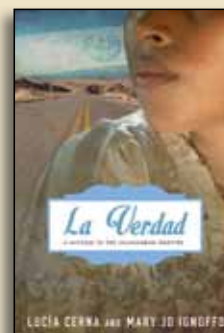
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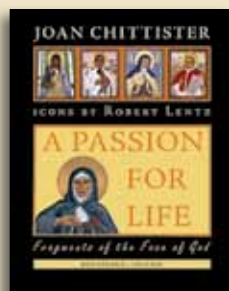
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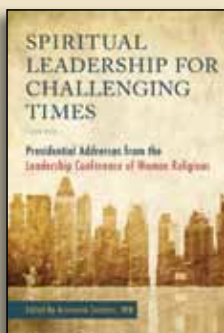
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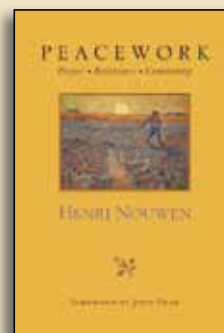
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MICHELLE ALEXANDER'S *The New Jim Crow*, published in 2010, changed the way Americans understand racialized incarceration in the U.S. If W.E.B. DuBois made clear that the "color line" was the issue of the 20th century, then Alexander is teaching us that mass incarceration is the color line's insidious 21st century version. Growing awareness, however, is leading to changed policies and restored lives for thousands. In this issue, Alexander lays out the challenges she sees ahead.

To succeed, justice movements such as the one Alexander describes must be based in deep-rooted ethical and theological

principles, such as those that make up Catholic social teaching. In the decades since the 1891 encyclical "On the Condition of Labor," this body of doctrine relating to the church and the world provides insights into specific issues that Christians face today. Tom Allio, a longtime social action director in Ohio, reviews the principles of Catholic social teaching and the ways that Pope Francis has renewed them.

Franciscan Brother Robert Lentz, a classically trained iconographer, has spent many



years in a studio in suburban Maryland painting his prayers. We think you'll recognize his art, even if you didn't know his name. In these pages you'll find a peek into his studio as well as the story of the spiritual journey that informs his artistic vocation.

Finally, we look at the creative work being done by four young activists in the country's heartland, who model how to be rooted and engaged in the places where we live, wherever that may be. ■

Letters

BIT OF A STRETCH

"Did Jesus Pray to Allah?" (by Ryan McAnnally-Linz and Miroslav Volf, May 2014) was a bit of a stretch in an effort to make a good point. It's like putting a single bed sheet on a double bed. It's possible to put one end in snugly, but the other side pops out and is not a tight fit. The article makes good points of comparison, but it gives only passing note to Jesus' teaching to love our enemies, which is something the authors state many Muslim thinkers do not embrace. It seems like this is not just a difference, but perhaps the significant difference. Remember the greatest commandment.

Gerald C. Solt
via *sojo.net*

COMMINGLED RELIGIOUS ROOTS

Reading "Did Jesus Pray to Allah?" made me think about the millions of Spanish-speaking Christians who invoke the name of Allah by using the Spanish word *ojalá*, and Portuguese-speakers who use *oxalá*. Both are derived from the Arabic *Insha'Allah* which means "if Allah wills it" and are left over from 800 years of Muslim control of the Iberian Peninsula. In common parlance it means "hopefully," and nowadays it's a reminder that our commingled religious roots go deep. We should never let words (Allah, God) divide us, especially now.

Richard Mier
Martinsburg, West Virginia

"We should never let words (Allah, God) divide us."

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

I enjoy comparative theology, but I have a hard time with your cover article ("Did Jesus Pray to Allah?"). First off, I think the article was disingenuously titled. Saying "Christians and Muslims pray to the same God" is different than asking "Did Jesus pray to Allah?" Jesus cried to God using the words, "Eli, Eli," but because Eli is linguistically similar to the word Allah it means very little in comparative religion. Good comparative religion seeks to create understanding amongst differences between faiths. Bad comparative religion attempts to smooth over those differences with a thin layer of problematic theology. I'm afraid this article falls under the second category. I expect better theology from *Sojourners*.

Patrick Ryan
via *sojo.net*

MONEY AND TORTURE

David Gushee's "In the Name of Security" (April 2014) is an outstanding article. I would add this slightly different stance: The 10 resources used to address the 10 elements of democratic heritage seem to omit the caustic influence of money. Once money became more prominent, I'd guess beginning in the 1970s or so, our moral underpinning

couldn't withstand another basic human trait, greed. Money and greed have corroded so much of our political and moral processes that evil has to do nothing but admire its pervasiveness. Keep up the good work and cutting-edge stories.

Bob Turk
via *sojo.net*

HOPE, PROMISE, AND LOVE

As a campus pastor I meet with many students each week. I wanted to thank you for your article on the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch ("What is to Prevent Me from Being Baptized?" by Reta Halteman Finger, April 2014). In the past week I have talked with two students about this article and was able to share the hope, promise, and love of God through these words and this incredible story. One student identifies as transgender and was particularly moved by this piece. Thank you for your work and ministry. I am so grateful for *Sojourners*.

Name Withheld by Request

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BY JIM WALLIS

Giving Thanks for a True Disciple



MY DEAR FRIEND Glen Stassen passed away on April 26. Glen was a key ally, a kindred spirit, and a deeply respected member of the Sojourners board. In my view, Glen was the most important Christian ethicist of his time because he taught us what it means to follow Jesus.

Many years ago a tall, thin, and very bright young man came to visit Sojourners community in Washington, D.C. He told us he was an ethics professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and that he wanted to live with us and volunteer serving the poor. Glen stayed in one of our households and served on our food line, distributing bags of groceries to low-income families just 20 blocks from the White House. From my first conversation with him to the last, Glen Stassen never stopped talking about Jesus—and how Christians must not

ethics theorist but a gifted practitioner who knew how to mobilize movements and change public policy. As a true disciple of Jesus, Glen wanted to change the world.

I HAD THE great blessing of offering the opening prayer at his funeral. Here is what I prayed:

“Oh Lord, thank you for Glen Stassen. Those of us gathered give thanks for a husband, father, grandfather, uncle, teacher, mentor, friend, ally, and co-conspirator for the ethics of the kingdom of God in this world. Thank you, Jesus, for how Glen Stassen understood that you want to change the world, and not just our own lives, but beginning with our lives.

“Thank you for how Glen taught us not just to believe in you, but to follow you—without our many equivocations, our theological restrictions and dualisms, and our political compromises. Thank you for how he understood that the kingdom of God requires social, economic, and racial justice. Thank you for how Glen explained to us the realistic meaning of your words ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God,’ and how he found the ‘transforming initiatives’ in the Sermon on the Mount that change the world.

“Glen Stassen moved us from our thin private piety toward a ‘thicker Jesus.’ He moved us from belief to discipleship—incarnational discipleship—where faithfulness must stand the test of history. He moved us from just peace loving to just peacemaking—a vision that takes us deeper and further than the church’s academic arguments about war and peace. He moved us from thinking to acting—from talking about Christian ethics to doing Christian ethics. As a professor he moved from only teaching to also mentoring, as many here today can testify.



“Glen Stassen taught us what the incarnation meant—that God hit the streets in Jesus and that following Jesus means that we must go into the streets too. Pope Francis is now reminding us of the same thing. Oh, the conversations Francis and Glen might have had!

“We thank you, God, that Glen loved Jesus so much that he actually wanted to follow him and ask us to follow Jesus too. He lived the truth of these words by Clare of Assisi: ‘We become what we love, and who we love shapes what we become.’ Glen lived long, but we all feel today that his time with us was cut short. But now he goes to be with you, Jesus, the one he so loved and wanted to follow. We pray that he will now know your rest and peace, the peace of Christ, knowing that the impact of his life will go on, through the countless people that he taught, near and far, as a real professor of Christian ethics.

“Glen will live on through us and, especially, through the new generation he took under his wing—to nurture, encourage, and empower. We love him and miss him already. But now we give him back to you. He called us to go deeper into our faith, and we will, enabled by his ideas, passion, and spirit.

“For the gift of Glen Stassen to us, and to the world, we give you thanks. And all the people said, Amen!” ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners.

In everything he did, Glen sought to bring Christian ethics to public life.

just believe in Christ in word but also follow him in deed. His most influential book, *Kingdom Ethics*, co-authored with David P. Gushee, was also the passion of his life and work.

Before Glen became a professor, he had a promising career in nuclear physics. He loved his work, but he was not willing to work in weapons development so he left to attend seminary and become a biblical scholar. Eventually, Glen formulated a powerful vision of “just peacemaking.” Using the creative and critical practices of conflict resolution, Glen’s framework guides us toward effective and faithful actions to both prevent and end wars.

In everything he did, Glen sought to bring Christian ethics to public life. Working with Glen on the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, I quickly discovered that he was not just an

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The Human Cost

In northwestern Pakistan this spring, a group of artists displayed a poster—large enough to be visible from drones and satellites—of a girl whose parents were killed by a drone. The Not a Bug Splat project creates large images that become part of military online imaging databases. Since 2004, CIA-directed drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas have killed at least 2,296 people, including 416 civilians, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. At least 168 of the victims were children.

By Emily Nielsen Jones

Back from the Brink

When the economic floor drops low for everyone, it drops even lower for women.

THE PHRASE “POVERTY in America” still conjures up, for many of us, images of a homeless person begging on an urban street corner or a dilapidated shack in rural Appalachia. But a report this winter presents a very different picture of poverty in the U.S.: “a working mother dashing around getting ready in the morning, brushing her kid’s hair with one hand, and doling out medication to her own aging mother with the other.”

The study released in January by The Shriver Report, “A Woman’s Nation Pushes Back from the Brink,” examined the rates of financial insecurity among U.S. women. The report notes that the average woman is paid 77 cents for every dollar the average man earns, and that closing this wage gap would cut the poverty rate in half for working women and their families.

A few years ago, I was at a global women’s conference looking at the economic dimensions of women’s realities when I first heard the phrase “time poverty,” in an academic

talk given by a sociologist. The phrase captured the deeply insidious economic realities that are holding back women’s equality. Most mothers know this reality as we multi-task through our day trying to hold life together for our families. Women everywhere carry the double burden of working outside the home

the hub in the middle of everyone’s wheel. Any tiny setback—a lost pacifier, a sick child—can threaten the whole highly tenuous ecosystem of the day.

Creating a more just, gender-balanced world will continue to require work at many levels. Yet the more I engage in women’s real-

Any tiny setback—a lost pacifier, a sick child—can threaten the highly tenuous ecosystem of the day.

to support their families while still doing the large majority of unpaid domestic work.

The phrase “time poverty” stuck with me and, strangely, captures my reality as a mother of three leading a relatively privileged life. For those of us in the mothering season of life, all over the world, time is not exactly on our side. From sunup to sunset, we find ourselves constantly multitasking, moving as fast as possible and feeling like

ities here and around the world, the more I see how large-scale economic forces are undermining so much progress. We need women to keep breaking glass ceilings—in business, in politics, in education—and we need to challenge the deeply insidious religious ideas that continue to treat females as a lesser-than category of human beings. But the elephant in our neo-liberal, capitalism-on-steroids world is that when the economic

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floor drops low for everyone, it drops even lower for women.

How do we create an economy that works for more of us? How can we reform our capitalist system from within to raise the tide for all socio-economic levels, not just the top income bracket? When women are at the brink, as is true for so many, they will continue to be at risk of being victimized by social ills from trafficking and rape to domestic violence—not to mention health issues from working two or three jobs and coming home to a pile of dishes, dirty laundry, and kids who need to be bathed.

There are no easy answers to the feminization of poverty, but a starting point is to become informed (start by reading the Shriver Report!) and feel the inhumanity of

the treadmill too many hardworking women are on today. There are some first-step things we can do to help, such as raising the minimum wage and putting pressure on our own workplaces to make sure the lowest paid workers are getting a living wage. We can also use our collective clout as shareholders of publicly held investments to look critically at the egregious gap between the highest paid workers and the median salary.

Many people are starting to challenge the legitimacy of a winner-take-all-economy that is undermining the ideals of equality, liberty, and justice for all. It often begins with the question, "What can I do?" ■

Emily Nielsen Jones is co-founder and president of the Imago Dei Fund.

By David P. Gushee

The Stubborn Persistence of 'Jew-Hatred'

The term "anti-Semitism" hides an ugly history of racialized animus.

THE SHOOTINGS THAT took three lives this spring at a Jewish community center and retirement complex in Kansas are a reminder that deadly strains of what is usually called "anti-Semitism" remain with us. The fact that the shooter was a deranged white supremacist should not prevent us from coming to terms with the roots and survival of Jew-hatred in our culture.

Anti-Semitism is a made-up word that itself gives clues to the history of Jew-hatred in our civilization. The term was coined by German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1879, one of a number of Jew-haters who were turning longstanding European Christian hatred of Jews into something modern and racial. The "Jewish problem," therefore, became the "fact" that there was a racial group, the "Semites," who were a mortal threat to another racial group, the "Aryans," and therefore needed to be removed from Aryan societies. All right-thinking Germans/Europeans/Aryans, the argument went, needed to unite to combat the Semites through a scientific *antisemitismus*. The term is usually written "anti-Semitism" in English, but that usage profoundly reinforces the racist myth that there is a race of "Semites" needing to be opposed by

"anti-Semites." The term Jew-hatred is better because it refuses to participate in this mythology.

Modern racialized Jew-hatred flowed into the 20th century and crystallized most disastrously in Nazi Germany. There, over 12 terrible years, the 19th century anti-Jewish program was enacted, and then exceeded. Jews were to be "eliminated" from among the "Aryans," a program that became annihilation after 1939, with 6 million Jews murdered.

The paradigmatic evil of the Nazis makes it easy for the casual observer to think that Jew-hatred was born and died with Hitler. But not only did Hitler and his party dine on a modern, racial *antisemitismus* predating them by decades, even that racialized Jew-hatred was parasitic on an earlier 1,800 years of Christian contempt for Jews.

Christianity and rabbinic Judaism were born together in the late first century. Christianity began as a Jewish messianic movement, and with rabbinic Judaism became the two primary forms of Jewish life to survive the catastrophic Jewish-Roman war of 66 to 73 C.E.

New Testament readers can think of it this way: After 73 C.E., the temple officials,

From the Archives

July 1991

An Issue of Justice

MOST discussions about the Bible and homosexuality are limited to a handful of passages and the subject is viewed as a moral issue in which the burden of proof is placed on lesbians and gay men to defend our right to be who we are in light of those passages. If we approach scripture understanding that heterosexism, like sexism and racism, is a justice issue, then we move to a different plane of inquiry.

We might then understand that what is at stake in questions of sexual morality is not sexual orientation per se but rather the rightful or wrongful use of sexuality whatever our orientation. Sexual sins can occur in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships wherever people are exploited, abused, neglected, or treated as objects. On the other hand, love, commitment, tenderness, nurture, respect, and communication can be expressed in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships.

As I come to scripture with a lesbian feminist hermeneutic, the stories of oppression and exodus, exile and homecoming, death and resurrection take on new meaning. Our scriptural study will be stunted if we stop our inquiry only having asked, What does the Bible say about homosexuality? and fail to ask, What do lesbians and gay men have to tell us about the Bible? How do the biblical stories come alive in fresh ways when they are read, seen, and heard by lesbians and gay men? ■

Melanie Morrison was co-pastor of Phoenix Community Church in Kalamazoo, Mich., when this article appeared.



Sadducees, Herodians, and Zealots were all destroyed, discredited, or rendered superfluous; only the Pharisees (progenitors of the rabbis) and the Jesus movement survived the failed revolt and the destruction of the temple. Together and apart, rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity competed to claim the mantle as the true successors/interpreters of ancient Judaism and competed for penetration of the spiritually hungry Greco-Roman world.

Christianity eventually won. Moving from the margins to the center of the late Roman imperium, Christianity became the official religion. Fatefully and terribly, church and state leaders attacked the Jewish people and Judaism itself. A virulent “teaching of contempt” coursed through the writings of the Fathers of the church and moved forward generation after generation along well-established tropes: Jews as Christ-killers, children of Satan, hopelessly blind reprobates, and so on. Meanwhile Jews and Judaism constantly faced state persecution, expulsion, and martyrdom at Christian hands.

This centuries-old cesspool of Jew-hatred was the ultimate source of modern racialized

Jew-hatred. The horrors of the Holocaust discredited Jew-hatred, but its cultural and religious sources run so deep that it is always available to be drawn upon.

And that’s why deranged shooters outside Kansas community centers are not just deranged shooters. They are the stubborn continuing embodiments of Christianity’s oldest moral failure. Today’s Christians must know this history in order to resist it.

Resistance includes careful handling of the Bible so as not to fall into anti-Jewish reading, preaching, and teaching. It involves getting to know the living history of Judaism and the real Jewish believers we share communities with today. It requires carefully distinguishing between opposition to certain policies of the State of Israel over against rejection of Israel itself. And it demands that we forcefully reject any stereotyping, derogatory speech, or other forms of Jew-hatred when we encounter them. ■

David P. Gushee is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University and a Sojourners contributing editor.

By Lisa Sharon Harper

Schuette vs. the Image of God

Can a vote outlaw equal protection under the law? The Court seems to think so.

IN 2006, A MAJORITY of Michigan voters amended their state constitution to outlaw the use of race in college admissions. Supporters of affirmative action challenged that amendment in court; in April, the U.S. Supreme Court (in a case known as *Schuette vs. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action*) affirmed Michigan’s right to ban the use of affirmative action by public universities.

Justice Sonya Sotomayor issued a 58-page dissent with a blistering critique of the court’s ruling. Sotomayor pointed out the illogic of the majority opinion that the case was about the voters’ right to self-governance. “This case,” she wrote, “is about how the debate over the use of race-sensitive admissions policies may be resolved ... that is, it must be resolved in constitutionally permissible ways.”

Sotomayor explained in her dissent

that “by permitting a majority of the voters in Michigan to do what our Constitution forbids, the Court ends the debate over race-sensitive admissions policies in Michigan in a manner that contravenes constitutional protections long recognized in our precedents.” In other words, if we allow the majority to rule without limits, then affirmative action is effectively dead.

Prior to the 2006 vote, admissions policies were governed by institutions’ own governing boards. Citizens could influence admissions policy by utilizing the mechanisms within the political structure of the board, by lobbying board members, or voting them in or out in statewide elections. The 2006 vote changed the structure of Michigan politics.

University alumni could still lobby for policies that favor their legacy students. Parents of athletes or students in a particular

area of study could still lobby board members directly to alter policies in their favor. But parents of minority students were banned from utilizing the same mechanisms for their children.

Andrew Cohen of the Brennan Center for Justice notes a connection between the Schuette ruling and Shelby County (Ala.) vs. Holder, which hobbled the preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Act last year. According to Cohen, the two rulings are “different sides of the same coin.” The Shelby County decision told Southern legislators they could change voting procedures to make it harder for minorities to exercise their right to vote. Schuette tells voters they can restrict procedural remedies for minority students and by extension minority communities. “In each case,” Cohen argued, “the Court sought to somehow extract race out of racial problems.”

Therein lies the rub: Schuette and Shelby strike at the heart of what it means to be American.

The Fourteen Amendment declares, “No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States ... nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” Yet both recent rulings allow states to pass laws that intentionally (or unintentionally) abridge the privileges of minorities, thereby denying equal protection of the law.

But Schuette and Shelby are not only un-American, they are un-Christian. To deny equal protection is to look into the face of minorities and deny equal possession of the image of God. What's more, these particular rulings allow majorities to deny minorities the equal capacity to self-govern—to exercise dominion.

Justice Sotomayor warned, “I firmly believe that our role as judges includes policing the process of self-government and stepping in when necessary to secure the constitutional guarantee of equal protection.”

As Christians, our role is to stand with those on the margins, to bear witness to the image of God within them, and, sometimes, to say no to the will of the majority for the sake of Christ's common good. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper is senior director of mobilizing at Sojourners.



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To the Women of Syria

“I wish I could sit beside you on a cushion on the floor and have a cup of tea with you. I would like to snuggle your baby in my arms. I would like to hear your story. I know you have a sad story, and if I heard it, I would weep.

I know you are good and loving women. I'm sorry you have lost so much. I'm sorry you had to come to a country, a city, and a house that is not yours.

I can imagine you in your own country, strong women serving others. I can imagine you making beautiful food and sharing it with your family and friends. I can imagine you caring for your mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, sisters and brothers and friends. Just the way I do.

Because that's what women do. We are compassionate. We give. We

who had been suffering for many years came to Jesus. She was sick, and nobody could heal her body or comfort her mind. People had given up on her. But she believed that Christ could heal her, if she could just touch his robe. So she pushed her way silently through the crowd that followed Jesus. And finally, she touched his robe.

Immediately he stopped. “Who has touched me?” he asked. “Power has flowed out of me. I want to know who touched me!” She was afraid, certain he was angry and would punish her, but she felt compelled to answer. “It was me,” she whispered. “I am the one who touched you.” The crowd hushed, anxious to see what this great man would do. Jesus simply looked at her—right into her eyes. Then he said, “Daughter, your faith is great. Your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

When I read that story, I wondered why Jesus stopped, why he forced that frightened woman to speak up. I believe he wanted her to know that he saw her. She wasn't just an anonymous person in a huge crowd. She was an individual woman. And he saw her. He knew she was suffering, and that broke his heart. He called her “daughter” so she would understand how much he loved her. He said she had great faith in God, and he honored her for it. Then he healed the wounds of her body and soul.

As a Christian, I believe Jesus shows us what God is like. He shows us that God sees each of us as individuals. He calls us daughters because he loves us. He honors our faith because he knows it can make us strong. He cares when we suffer. He wants to bring healing, comfort, and



A Syrian woman waits for aid at a refugee camp.

peace into our lives. Scripture tells us that Jesus weeps, which means that God weeps too, for all God's suffering daughters.

I wish I could end the war ravaging your country. I wish I could gather all the money in the world to help make your lives easier. I wish I could bring back all you have lost. I can't do any of that, but I can do this: I can go home and tell what I've seen: how you are suffering and how amazing Jordanians are walking lovingly with you during this time of hardship. Both you and your Jordanian friends need the prayers and support of U.S. Christians. I will tell my friends that.

I will also tell my friends how beautiful and strong and loving you are. I will tell them you are women of deep faith in God. Women who adore your children as I adore mine. Women who sacrifice willingly for those you love. I will tell them that when I look into your eyes, I see that we are sisters.

I will not forget you. I will pray for you. I will tell your stories. I will weep when I hear anew of your suffering. And I will rejoice over any goodness that comes your way. God has placed you in my heart. ■



Lynne Hybels (lynnehybels.com), co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church, is author of *Nice Girls Don't Change the World*. This is adapted from a talk she gave in May to 200 Syrian refugee women in Jordan.

I wish I could end the war ravaging your country.

serve. We protect. We work hard to make the world better for the people we love.

Wherever I go in the world, I discover that we women are very much alike. We may have different clothes. Different languages. Different cultures. Maybe our skin is a different color. But in our hearts, we are the same.

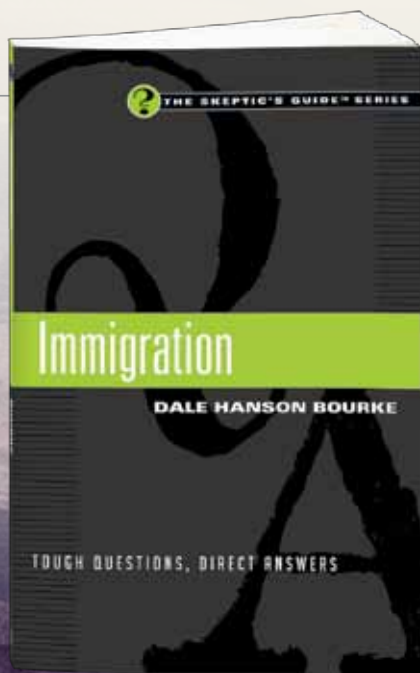
That's why we can look into each other's eyes and feel connected. We can talk without using words. We can smile. We can hug. We can laugh.

And sometimes, we can feel each other's pain. I have prayed that God would help me feel your pain. I wish I could remove your pain. I wish I could help you carry it.

Last night while I prayed for you, I remembered a story about Jesus Christ. In the story a woman

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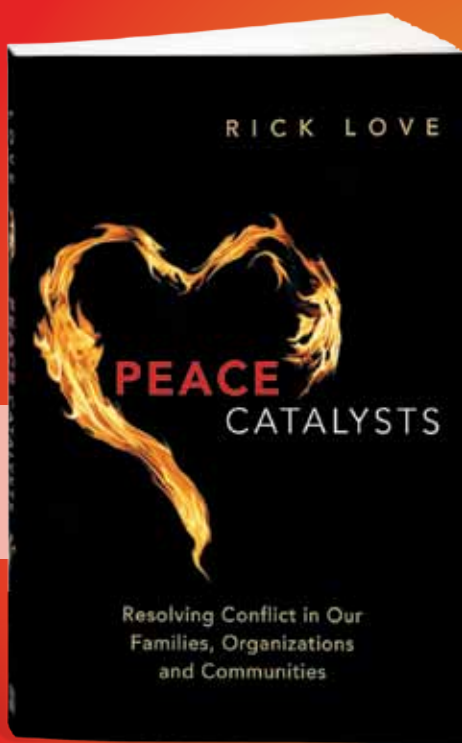
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Rick Love is president of Peace Catalyst International and serves as associate director of the World Evangelical Alliance Peace and Reconciliation Initiative. Learn more about Rick's reconciliation ministry at peace-catalyst.net.



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Philip Seymour Hoffman as Lester Bangs, left, giving advice to a young writer in the film *Almost Famous*.

The Strength to be Uncool

DURING THE WINTER of my sophomore year in high school, a fistfight broke out in the cafeteria. It wasn't anybody I knew especially well, and it didn't get very far, but it marked a day in my life I'll never forget.

Once the commotion started and the chant of "fight, fight, fight" rose up in the lunchroom, everybody stood to cheer and watch. I did too, craning my neck to try to see better, probably wearing a sophomoric

JJ just stared off into space.

Finally, the contrast felt too much for me, and I said, "Hey JJ, why didn't you get up?"

"I don't like fights," he responded. Then he looked me straight in the eye and said, "You don't like fights either."

He was right. JJ and I had been friends for a long time and had talked often about our dim view of high school fights.

Small as it might seem, I couldn't get the matter out of my head. Why had JJ stayed seated while I stood up?

It's a question that leads me to a great scene in the film *Almost*

Famous, the scene where the legendary rock journalist Lester Bangs (played by the late Philip Seymour Hoffman) offers advice to a young writer just starting out. Bangs is mad about the direction rock and roll is going, and he blames rock journalists. They go to parties, they hang out with "girls," they become friends with the musicians. Pretty soon they're writing "sanctimonious stories about the genius of rock stars." This not only corrupts the moral core of the writers, it threatens to ruin the music. Lester Bangs doesn't even try to hide his disgust as he describes

it—rock and roll is in danger of becoming just another "industry of cool." It will no longer be real. It will no longer be authentic. It will reach only for the lowest rung on the ladder: your high school classmate's idea of cool.

I think a lot of problems in this world stem from people lacking the courage to follow their moral core and instead following their high school classmate's idea of cool.

The veteran Lester Bangs has built a life around his moral core, namely, a particular vision of rock and roll. Bangs gives the young writer some advice: Keep your distance from the band and the parties and the "girls." Focus on what really matters—the music—and be honest and unmerciful about it. Finally, he drops this gem: "The only true currency in this bankrupt world is what you share with someone else when you're uncool."

I wish I'd gotten that advice in high school. I wouldn't have stood up for that stupid fight. I would have stayed in my seat with JJ, the two of us taking pride in an act of supreme uncoolness. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American of Indian heritage.

A lot of problems stem from people lacking the courage to follow their moral core.

smirk on my face. It felt to me as if the whole world had gotten to its feet.

Everybody except one person. I only noticed when it was over and all of us turned to sit back down. My friend JJ hadn't budged. Judging by the fact that his sandwich was almost gone, he hadn't even let the matter affect his lunch. He didn't ask any questions about the fight—not who was involved, not whether there was blood, not who won—he just bit into his apple.

The rest of us tittered on about the whole thing. Who we were rooting for, whether it would continue at the park after school, blah blah blah.

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HOW TO DISMANTLE THE 'NEW JIM CROW'

by MICHELLE ALEXANDER

**Public attitudes
about mass
incarceration
are changing.
But it will take a
much deeper
transformation
to overturn this
21st century
caste system.**

illustration by
**DARCY
MUENCHRATH**

I HEAR A STIRRING, a rumbling. An awakening. Sometimes the sound is so faint, I worry it's my imagination, my optimism getting the best of me. I pause, listen, and wait. Here it comes again. I want to rush to my window, fling it open, stick my head way out, and look around. Is it happening? For real this time? Is the sleeping giant finally waking up?

God knows we've slept too long.

Many of us—myself included—slept through a revolution. Actually, it was a counterrevolution that has blown back much of the progress that so many racial justice advocates risked their lives for. This counterrevolution occurred with barely a whimper of protest, even as a war was declared, one that purported to be aimed at “drugs.”

Really, the war took aim at people—overwhelmingly poor people and people of color—who were taken prisoner en masse and then relegated to a permanent, second-class status, stripped of basic civil and human rights such as the right to vote, the right to serve on juries, and the right to be free from legal discrimination in employment, housing, and access to education and public benefits. Branded “criminals” or “felons,” millions of people discovered that the very rights supposedly won in the civil rights movement no longer applied to them.

A penal system unprecedented in world history emerged in a few short decades;



We face a profound moral and spiritual crisis, not merely a social, political, or economic one.

by the year 2000, 2 million people found themselves behind bars, and 60 million were saddled with criminal records that would condemn them for life—staggering statistics, given that in the 1970s there were only about 350,000 people in prison.

I am listening carefully at my window now. I hear that rumbling sound, signs of an awakening in the streets. My heart leaps for joy. People of all colors are beginning to raise their voices a little louder; people who have spent time behind bars are organizing for the restoration of their civil and human rights; young people are becoming bolder and more defiant in challenging the prison-industrial complex; and people of faith are finally waking up to the uncomfortable reality that we have been complicit in the birth and maintenance of a system predicated on denying to God's children the very forms of compassion, forgiveness, and possibilities for redemption that we claim to cherish.

Even in the halls of power, winds of change have begun to blow. I turn on the news and I see the attorney general of the United States condemning

felon disenfranchisement laws and harsh mandatory minimum sentences and expanding the criteria for clemency for those imprisoned for nonviolent offenses. For the first time in decades, it appears that the prison building boom is slowing down, the numbers of people being locked in cages beginning to decline. State legislatures are reforming drug laws aimed at nonviolent drug offenders, marijuana legalization has taken hold in Colorado and Washington, and 17 states have passed laws decriminalizing marijuana. Change is in the air.

It all looks so good from here, on my couch, with the remote control in one hand. How tempting it is to imagine that this problem is sorting itself out on its own. But as my thoughts drift toward complacency, I hear that voice whispering to me again, a voice that returns whenever I get tired or lazy and begin to think maybe someone else will do my work, make my contribution for me. That inner voice repeats the words of

Martin Luther King Jr. “[H]uman progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability,” King said. “It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of

dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God. And without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation.”

Social stagnation. That is precisely the danger we face now: a little reform here, a little reform there, and then ... nothing. A new normal that looks and feels much like the old. The sleeping giant may toss and turn but ultimately choose to stay in bed, imagining that someone else will do the work that is ours to do. Many of us have comfortable beds and simply don't want to be disturbed.

I remember my early stirrings. Although I was a civil rights lawyer and firmly committed to social justice, it took me a long while to see the bigger picture. Only after years of representing victims of racial profiling, investigating patterns of drug law enforcement, and attempting to



assist people who had been released from prison “re-enter” society only to be faced with one legal barrier after another did I finally wake up to the reality that social justice advocates like me were *not* wrestling with mere social or legal problems. We were dealing with a vast new system of racial and social control—the rise of a new caste-like system in the U.S. It is a system that cannot be “reformed” and thereby redeemed any more than it would have been possible to reform slavery or Jim Crow and thereby approach justice.

The system of mass incarceration is rotten to its core. As Kaia Stern eloquently explains in her book *Voices from American Prisons*, the quintupling of our prison population in a few short decades and the relegation of tens of millions of people to a permanent second-class status is a reflection of the fact that we in the United States are captive to a “spirit of punishment.” She writes, “There is no more pressing human rights issue, no more urgent spiritual crossroads or threat to democracy, than the current penal crisis.”

The ultimate question for us, as people of faith and conscience, is whether we are willing to rise to the challenge this moment in our history presents. Are we willing to do the work? Are we willing to end the drug war in its entirety and shift to a public health model for dealing with drug addiction and abuse? Are we willing to abolish legal discrimination against people with criminal records—discrimination that denies them basic human rights to work, shelter, education, and food? Are we willing to organize for restorative, rehabilitative, and transformative models of justice that take seriously the interests of the victim, the offender, and the community as a whole? Are we willing to tell the truth—the whole truth—about the values and ideologies that brought us to this place and time? Or will we go back to sleep and tolerate a slightly downsized version of the prison industrial-complex, one that still cages and perpetually controls millions, but on a slightly smaller scale?

It will require great courage, and some real sacrifice, to stand up for, and to stand

with, the “least of these”—the criminals, the felons, the despised, and the “illegals”—and to insist publicly on their humanity, dignity, and value in the eyes of God. It will not be easy for people to learn to care for the drug addict and the drug dealer, or to see that the victim of a horrible crime as well as the perpetrator are both children of God and worthy of our profound care and concern. People may be reluctant to see that the woman who crossed the border illegally in the hope of a better life deserves our sincere compassion, as does the young man who sold some weed to help the mother of his child pay the rent. Cultivating such a shift in consciousness will require the birth of a movement unlike anything this nation has ever seen—one that is rooted in the awareness of the fundamental dignity and basic human rights of each and every one of us, no matter who we are, where we came from, or what we’ve done.

I know there are many people who say that surely much less will do; just look at all the progress that is being made in the halls of power. Sadly, though, so much of that



We're all children of God—no matter who we are or what we've done.

progress is illusory. Most of the reform at the state level has not been driven by a growing awareness of the value of the people and communities that have been destroyed in the race to incarcerate; rather, the progress has been motivated primarily by fiscal concerns—an effort by politicians to balance budgets in a time of economic crisis. Politicians across the political spectrum, including former “get-tough” true believers such as Newt Gingrich, are now calling for modest reforms because they know it is impossible to maintain this vast new penal state without raising taxes on the predominantly white middle class.

Yes, some progress can be made without building a truly transformative movement. We may manage to persuade mainstream voters that prisons are too expensive or that drug use should be viewed more as a public health problem than a crime, without ever challenging people (including ourselves) to care—really care—for the “others.” We can win by saying whatever the pollsters tell

us will work, and we can appeal to people’s self-interest and fiscal concerns. But if we choose that path, we cannot pretend we are trav-

eling a road that will lead to higher ground. What we face is a profound moral and spiritual crisis, not merely a social, political, or economic one.

IN THE END, if our advocacy fails to build a new moral consensus—if it fails to cultivate an ethic of genuine care, compassion, and concern for every human being of every class, race, and nationality—the reforms we achieve will not bring an end to caste-like systems in the U.S. Mass incarceration will remain, just downsized a bit, or a new system of racial and social control will emerge—one that we cannot foresee, just as the current system of mass incarceration was utterly unimaginable just 40 years ago.

The evil of these systems lies not in their cost, inefficiency, or impracticality. The evil lies in the belief that some of us are

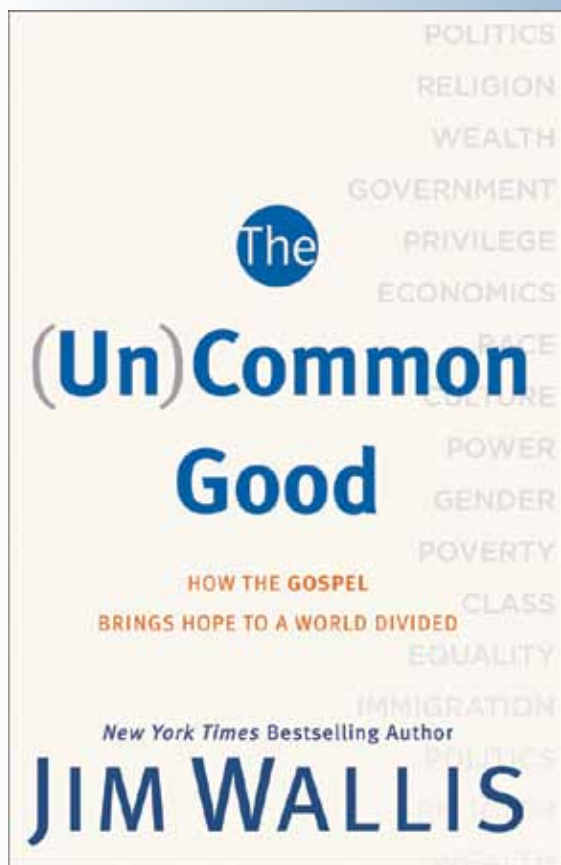
disposable, unworthy of care, compassion, or concern. And until we challenge that core belief, systems of racial and social control will continue to be born and thrive in this country for a long, long time.

So what are we to do? “People are ready to move in a new direction,” observes Iva Carruthers, who has been leading the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference’s faith-based network in consciousness-raising and movement-building efforts. “The challenge is charting a course that will lead to sustained change against the forces that undergird mass incarceration. The push must be strategic and focused on specific policy changes, but we must also be sure to frame this issue as one of fundamental human rights and unresolved issues of race and racism in America.”

Rev. Michael McBride, who leads the Lifeline for Healing Communities Campaign for the PICO Network, rightly emphasizes that genuine humility is required when entering this work. “People of faith are beginning to understand the theological and moral imperative to tear



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down this devastating system," he says. "But my fear is that many white-led congregations and organizations will enter this conversation unaware of the impact of race and privilege, both in the systems that perpetuate this evil and in the unconscious mindset that informs their own engagement with this issue." He believes that the way we can ensure we are moving in the right direction "is by making a commitment that churches and faith-based organizations will be willing to follow the leadership of people of color and impacted individuals/families in this fight."

McBride's words ring true with my own experience. When I was working as a civil rights lawyer, the temptation was ever-present to treat victims of racial profiling or those struggling to survive following release from prison as "clients"—people who were in need of my help, expertise, guidance, or assistance. Even as an African-American woman who was well versed in the dynamics of power and

Getting to Work

1 Awakening: It is impossible to build a transformative movement for justice if people remain in the dark about the magnitude of the crisis at hand, its origins, and its racial, economic, and political dimensions. I wrote *The New Jim Crow*

because I strongly suspected that most people simply had no idea what was really going on and that education was a necessary prerequisite to effective action. I still believe that's the case, and so urging people of faith and conscience to commit themselves to raising the consciousness of their congregations and communities is extremely important.

Encourage people to hold study groups, film screenings, public forums, and dialogues to help others awaken to what has happened on our watch and become motivated to join the movement. The Unitarian Universalists, the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Veterans of Hope, and PICO are all engaged in consciousness-raising work and have created study guides based on *The New Jim Crow* and other resources.

2 Building an Underground Railroad: Obviously, consciousness-raising is not enough—we will have to get to work. In my view, that necessarily involves building an "underground railroad" for people trying to make a break for true freedom in the era of mass incarceration and who desperately need help finding shelter, food, work, and reunification with their families.

This is work that every congregation and faith organization can undertake; many already are. The important thing is for people to frame and understand this work as part of a larger effort to end mass

Three steps for building a transformative movement for justice.

privilege, it was easy for me to forget that I had much to learn from the people I sought to help, and that they possessed not only the potential but every right to be leaders and true partners in this work.

All of us will need support and guidance as we find our voice and strength in building this movement, though some of us are facing truly desperate circumstances. Let us step forward, as we are, with arms open wide and ready to grow, challenge, and be challenged. We are all co-workers with God, together bending the arc of history toward justice.

May we rise up like a sleeping giant, awakening at last, and get to work making America and ourselves what we must become. ■

*Michelle Alexander is a civil rights lawyer, advocate, and legal scholar and author of **The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness**.*

incarceration, and to view those who are being helped not as merely recipients of charity but as equals and potential partners in this work.

3 Working for Abolition: In the days of slavery, it was not enough to usher a few to freedom, one by one; you had to be willing to work for abolition. Likewise, today it is not enough to simply build an underground railroad; we must be willing to work for the abolition of the system of mass incarceration as a whole.

In my view, that means getting to work on a number of fronts, including:

■ **Ending the drug war** once and for all;

■ **Ending all forms** of unnecessary yet legal discrimination against people with criminal records that denies them basic civil and human rights, including the right to vote and serve on juries, as well as the right to work, shelter, education, and food;

■ **Abandoning a purely punitive** approach to dealing with violence and working toward more restorative, rehabilitative, and transformative systems of justice; and

■ **Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline** by ending zero-tolerance school discipline policies and ensuring that every dollar that is saved from closing prisons is reinvested in education, job creation, drug treatment, and rebuilding the communities hardest hit by mass incarceration.

Several national organizations provide resources for local communities in this work, including but not limited to the ones already mentioned as well as the Drug Policy Alliance, the Justice Policy Institute, All of Us or None, the Sentencing Project, ACLU, the Advancement Project, Children's Defense Fund, NAACP, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, the HIRE Network, and the Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted People's Movement. —**Michelle Alexander**

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"People have forgotten the power that they can hold when they come together in an organized way."

— Holly Tilton Byrne,
with duck, in South Dakota

THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

From Orange City, Iowa, to York, Nebraska, and across the Midwest, young organizers are cultivating hope in rural places.

RURAL COMMUNITIES in the U.S. wrestle with many of the same problems facing the rest of the country—persistent unemployment, access to quality health care, air and water degradation, a broken immigration policy. Other issues—such as supporting sustainable farming practices and drawing young people into agriculture, lack of broadband access, and the challenges of small-town economic development—are more unique to rural life.

Even though the 46.2 million people living in rural U.S. counties constitute only 15 percent of the country's total population (spread across 72 percent of the nation's land area), we are all connected—urban, suburban, and rural—by foodways, waterways, wilderness areas, and our national politics. As one Midwest-based organizer put it, “many progressives fundamentally don't understand rural America—they don't even know why they should care about it. You can't understand the power of the tea party without understanding rural America. It is the key to the House of Representatives, and progressives will be hamstrung until they can make inroads in a few key congressional districts.”

But that organizer and others also draw power and hope from the deep history of populism in the rural Midwest and parts of the South, and the endurance of community-oriented values that aren't just “heartland” clichés.

While many young people are itching to leave rural areas and small towns—anxious to find better jobs, educational opportunities, or city culture—others have always stayed put or returned after time away. And some “city cousins” move to rural America, enjoying the opportunity to work on issues they care about (with the bonus of a brilliant night sky). Here are four stories of young people investing in rural communities in the Midwest. —**The Editors**

family photo

"It makes a difference in the lives of people."

RAE O'LEARY, 29, is a respiratory therapist and nurse on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation in north-central South Dakota. The reservation straddles two counties, the fourth- and 11th-poorest in the nation. O'Leary works for Missouri Breaks Industries Research Inc. in Eagle Butte, the reservation's hub with a population of about 1,300. She lives 20 miles out,

reservations were exempt because of tribal sovereignty. "A few of us developed a coalition that approaches the tribal council on a pretty regular basis with an ordinance we've drafted to make our reservation smoke-free in enclosed public places." She adds that they respect the traditional use of tobacco. But their group faced resistance from tribal leaders, who worry that the community isn't ready for such a change. O'Leary counters with findings from a study her group con-

"The million dollar question we ask ourselves every day is how to break the cycle of poverty." —Rae O'Leary

on a ranch with her husband and two young children. O'Leary is a member of the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa; her husband is a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, and their children are enrolled in that tribe.

"When I define how rural we are, I tell people our nearest Wal-Mart is two hours away. That's my point of reference for city folk.

"On the reservation, we have a multitude of issues that come with high rates of poverty: Asthma and a high prevalence of commercial tobacco use are two of them," says O'Leary. In 2010, South Dakota banned smoking in all enclosed workplaces, but the

ducted showing 76 percent want smoke-free air in enclosed public places, despite the 51 percent rate of tobacco use among reservation residents.

This work has national implications, she says. "There are four tribal nations across the U.S. that we are aware of that are smoke-free, out of approximately 566 tribes across the country, so it is a pretty new concept. People are watching us, to make an example of us if we are successful."

O'Leary says that lifelong smokers tend to be most opposed to public places going smoke-free. But among younger people, O'Leary notes a different attitude. "We worked with the tribe to make 27 new parks

across the reservation smoke-free," O'Leary says. "We felt strongly that one of the few places for kids to play in our rural area should be free of smoke and littered cigarettes and chewing tobacco." The person in charge of these parks is a recent college graduate. "I went in with three pages of talking points arguing to make these parks smoke-free. I got through maybe two bullet points and he's like, of course, why is this even a question?"

O'Leary says many health issues prevalent on the reservation can be attributed, at least in part, to poverty. "The million dollar question we ask ourselves every day is how to break the cycle of poverty, how to empower people to become educated, motivated, and make healthy decisions for themselves and their children. We do the best we can with what we have and hope it makes a difference in the lives of people we're working with."

"They are my neighbors."

HOLLY TILTON BYRNE, by some standards, is a city girl. Since age 10 she has lived in Brookings, S.D., a college town and the fourth largest city in the state. But she is quick to point out that these days she doesn't live in town. Instead, she lives on rural acreage with her "husband, chickens, ducks, cats, and dogs." She says she wouldn't trade the experience of walking outside her home at night, greeted by a sky full of stars, for anything.

Byrne, 28, brings together her natural leadership skills with her love of agriculture and agriculturalists. As a community organizer at Dakota Rural Action in Brookings, she works with people who see problems in their community and seek to change them. "My role is to give them tools they need to make that change."

Byrne is the main lead on the South Dakota Farm to School project (connecting students with healthy, local foods and agricultural education opportunities, and linking producers with school buyers). But her core responsibility is to help people make a difference in their communities through training, support, and any other assistance

Rae O'Leary (far left) and members of the Dupree, S.D., National Honor Society address high smoking rates in the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.



Photo courtesy Rae O'Leary



Photos courtesy Eduardo Rodriguez

they need, whether related to the Farm to School program, local food sales, policy issues, or city ordinances.

"This is the part of my work that makes me the most passionate," Byrne says. "Seeing the look on people's faces when they realize that they have used their voice to make change in the community in which they live is inspiring. Getting to play even a small support role in that process is an extremely rewarding experience."

"People have forgotten the power that they can hold when they come together in an organized way," she says. "If I am able to help them realize that power, then I have been successful. They are the true leaders and I am fortunate to have been given the opportunity to participate in the process."

Byrne serves on the city's Sustainability Council. "I come to know all sorts of people in town through my work—city councilors, doctors, nurses, teachers, people in the industrial fields, and experts at the university," Byrne believes the small population of her town gives her greater access, which is a positive in her work. "It is important to be able to get in and talk to people in the community about what their challenges are in day-to-day life," Byrne says, "and it is

not a huge struggle to find them, because they are my neighbors."

Doing it for the kids.

EDUARDO RODRIGUEZ has lived most of his 24 years in Orange City, Iowa. The community of 6,000 in the northwest corner of the state has a four-year college, where Rodriguez earned his degree. It also has an annual tulip festival celebrating the community's Dutch heritage, of which he is not a part. "Growing up Mexican-American here can be difficult because you can't be as open at celebrating your culture," Rodriguez says. "You don't want to be ostracized because of it. You want to celebrate your culture and feel good about where your family comes from."

That's one reason Rodriguez serves as youth development manager at Justice For All (JFA), a faith-based nonprofit in Rock Valley, Iowa, not far from Orange City. He facilitates a program called IMPACT: The



Eduardo Rodriguez and his IMPACT youth group (top) at Faith Reformed Church in Rock Valley, Iowa, promote leadership and community service.

Next Generation. Aimed at high school students, it meets once a week and focuses on having fun, building relationships, and helping the community. "They appreciate my time and willingness to get to know them," he says of the kids he works with. "It is cool to see they are excited about coming to IMPACT. I feel very blessed to do that for the kids."

Rodriguez also leads a mentoring program for Latino high school students in collaboration with a col-

lege group called Hispanics of Northwestern. "We focus on college prep, team-building, and cultural celebration," he says. "One of the struggles for lots of students is they aren't always fully prepared for college. We want to make sure students know their options and how to knock down barriers."

Rodriguez spent a year in Chicago interning with the Christian Community Development Association. "Living in Chicago was really cool," says Rodriguez. "It

was great to experience different lifestyles, cultures, and things that are open later at night.” He says he even considered staying there, but when the job at JFA became available he said yes “on the spot.”

Since Rodriguez is making a life in the town where he grew up, he already has lots of friends in his own age group. “Small towns have different social offerings,” he acknowledges. “You have to rely on really good relationships or there’s not much to do.” Another benefit of remaining in his small town is that he contributes to the larger community almost seamlessly. He is on the board of CASA, a northwest Iowa immigrant advocacy organization. He’s also on the board of a local hospital.

“The reason I do all this, the reason I get involved, the reason I want to see these kids prosper is [because] I know that they are made in the image of God and have inherent value because they are God’s creation. It gives me strength to work for them and advocate for them.”

“A community that is alive.”

VIRGINIA MEYER of the Center for Rural Affairs in York, Neb., describes herself as an “urban-to-rural worker bee helping rural people pursue their dreams. I combine policy solutions with on-the-ground practices that make rural areas and their residents thrive. I hope to guide people into farming by finding creative solutions to lack of land and access to capital, health insurance, and mentors.”

Meyer grew up in south Minneapolis, “in the big city, not in the suburbs,” she explains. At 21, she got the job at CRA, and lives nearby in Fremont, Neb. Now 27 and married with young children, she finds the rural lifestyle friendly for families. “Being around people you trust to take care of your kids, couples with kids you can be social with, is huge,” Meyer says. “Rural life is a lot more challenging when you are single.”

Despite these plusses, figuring out how to attract people to a rural area either for the first time or to come back home is a puzzle. A well-publicized rural challenge is lack of jobs. But that problem sometimes has an internal solution. “It is amazing to see younger people that I know starting their own business and being entrepreneurial, and seeing [other] people helping

those younger folks get started, encouraging them,” says Meyer.

Once they are there, she says it is important to encourage younger people to enter into leadership positions, making them feel like they have a stake in the community.

“If there is any hope of attracting and keeping people in rural communities, there need to be exciting, interesting, fresh things happening,” Meyer says. She doesn’t mean new shopping malls or restaurants. In her town of Fremont, ordinary people became social activists when they felt challenged to right a wrong in their community—a town ordinance that requires anyone seeking rental housing to prove their U.S. citizenship, an effort to prevent undocumented immigrants from obtaining housing. “The city council gave us the opportunity to vote on that, and a local group worked to get rid of that part of the ordinance. We lost by a lot.” And yet, that activism led to people—ranging from faith organizations to business groups—becoming aware they were interested in working on social justice and fair-housing issues. “We have a drum beat of positivity and energy happening in Fremont because of that,” says Meyer.

The CRA is deeply involved with community inclusion work. Latinos make up the fastest growing population in the rural Midwest and Great Plains, says Meyer. “When we have a generally aging population, then the new population of younger Latino families comes in, we need to understand they are the future of our communities.”

Latinos start business at higher rate than non-Latinos in small towns, Meyer says. “When I go to communities that have large Latino populations, I see filled storefronts, young people, and a community that is alive.” ■

Julianne Couch is a writer living on the western edge of the Mississippi River in Bellevue, Iowa. She is at work on a book about small rural towns called Far From Terminal: America’s Resilient Middle.



“When the new population of younger Latino families comes in, we need to understand they are the future of our communities.”

—Virginia Meyer

Hora Tertia

On the monastery walk,
in the clear daylight after
the night of heavy rain,

I consider the moonflower:
how the big spent blooms look like
three linen tea towels rinsed and wrung out,
three yellowed towels someone meant to
pin to the line to dry.

And I consider the very air:
how yesterday's weather seems back there
in memory, but is still out there,
a heft of warmth east of here by now,
off the continent, rolling in enormous
clouds above the Atlantic.

And I consider this waning moon:
how thin it seems this morning against
the washed blue sky, like an old pearl button,
chipped, worn smooth, but still securely fixed
behind those sheer clouds blown by weather—
though I know that it, too, is moved
and beloved.

Madeleine Mysko, a novelist and poet, is an ordained elder at Towson Presbyterian Church in Maryland.

Photo by Joshua McCullough/Getty Images







An Iconic Faith

**You may not recognize Robert Lentz's name,
but you probably know the work of his hands.**

by **PATRICIA ZAPOR** • photos by **LLOYD WOLF**

FRANCISCAN BROTHER ROBERT LENTZ is a contradictory blend of traditional and tradition-challenging. That same surprising mix could be said to typify his contemporary approach to the ancient art of iconography.

Brother Robert's work adorns cathedrals, churches, and homes of many faiths, though his name may not ring a bell, even among his fans.

But describe his icons of Martin Luther King Jr. or César Chávez, his portrayals of Jesus as black, Korean, and Navajo, and his non-Christian subjects including Mohandas Gandhi and the Sufi mystic Rumi, and the response may be "Oh, yes! I have one of those."

Icons—religious paintings used as aids in Christian prayer—have been called a "doorway into the kingdom of heaven." Brother Robert's icons are striking, often for the contemporary twists in classically structured images, such as the army canteen held by St. Toribio Romo, a 20th century Mexican priest who is revered as the patron of migrants crossing the border. His Chávez image carries a copy of the Constitution and wears a sweatshirt with the United Farmworkers logo. "Icons may contain anachronisms," he said, "when there is a great truth at stake."

Brother Robert's work—and his life—seem often to focus on such anachronisms in pursuit of truth. At 67, he is a Roman Catholic Franciscan brother in the New York-based Holy Name Province, living and working in a studio created for him in the order's seminary

Robert Lentz's "Christ of Maryknoll," above, was inspired by the Maryknoll religious order, which "endeavors to see the Christ among the least of us, and to serve the Christ that lives in the margins of this world." At left, the artist works on his latest icon, a rendering of religious philosopher Simone Weil.

IT WAS ART that brought him back to the Franciscans of his youth.



Above, Robert Lentz in his studio, which includes a photo of artist Georgia O'Keeffe and an anatomical visual aid. At far left, the artist and his protégé, Michael Reyes.

"Any
change
I've made
to the art
of icons has
been painful
for me."



near Washington, D.C. A religious brother is not a priest, though he lives by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and dedicates his life to charitable service. It's Brother Robert's second stretch as a Franciscan, the order founded by St. Francis of Assisi. But it's his third stint in religious life, having also come close to ordination as a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

LENTZ WAS BORN and raised in Colorado, where Orthodox churches were few and Russians even fewer. The Lentz family's Russian Orthodox history was downplayed in the interest of fitting into the Western way of life, he said. In the midst of the Cold War, Brother Robert grew up with Orthodox traditions at home, but the Catholic Church in practice.

At 17 he joined the Franciscans, spending

Lentz's icons depict not only traditional saints, but also contemporary subjects—including activists Dorothy Day, César Chávez, and Martin Luther King Jr.

10 years as a friar in the New Mexico province. Just short of taking final vows, he left the Franciscans to pursue religious life among the Orthodox.

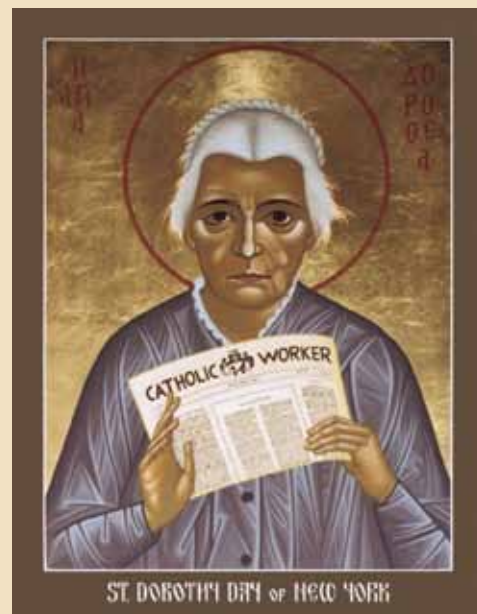
"I was Orthodox because I felt it was the true church" reaching back most directly to Jesus, Brother Robert said. The Orthodox Church sent him to work in an orphanage in the Andean foothills outside of Santiago, Chile. The church wanted him to marry as part of his path toward ordination, and it helped him find a wife. "It was a loveless marriage," Lentz said. But since he sought to serve as a priest outside a monastery, he needed to marry.

Then there was a 5 a.m. raid on his home by the Chilean secret police. Six armed men, part of dictator Augusto Pinochet's greatly feared "security forces," broke into Lentz's home, questioned him briefly, and tore the place apart in a sloppy search, mistakenly accusing him of being a communist. His wife, fearing that she would become one of the thousands who were tortured or disappeared under Pinochet, fled to the United States. They divorced soon after.

Ironically, Brother Robert learned through this incident (primarily by how quickly he was released after being detained) that some Orthodox Church leaders had uncomfortably close ties to the dictatorship. He began to think the church had "messed with my mind." He said he saw that "people who claimed to be part of the one true church" had attitudes of hatefulness toward Catholics and Protestants and dangerous political alliances, such as those with the Pinochet regime. "Seeing myself in the mirror, I didn't want to be that." This started him on a lengthy period of spiritual searching.

It also opened a path to seriously pursuing his talent as an artist. Before his break with the Orthodox Church, he spent six months as an apprentice in the school of renowned Greek iconographer Photios Kontoglou at Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline, Mass. "They also taught me to pray," he said.

THROUGHOUT HIS HIATUS from vowed religious life, Brother Robert continued to have an active private prayer life, and he created a lot of religious art. Coming through periods of physical and spiritual wandering,





St. Mary Magdalene, top, and St. Josephine Bakhita of Sudan.

including even a few months of homelessness, he built a successful career as an artist in New Mexico.

It was art that brought him back to the Franciscans of his youth. He'd heard that a monastery being built for the Franciscans was to include outdoor Stations of the Cross. The friars were searching for an artist to create images for the 15 niches. A meeting was arranged with the province superior. "We met at the building site. I had no intention except getting a job," Brother Robert said. It turned out that the superior had been a classmate from Lentz's decade as a novice. They spent time catching up on where their lives had taken them.

"We were going up some stairs when I blurted out, 'I would like to end my life living in vows,'" he said, explaining that he had no idea where the declaration had come from, but knowing it to be true. "Within two weeks I was back in," he said. "Part of me was repelled by the idea. I worried whether there was room for my art" in the religious life.

He has indeed found room for his art. He has been back with the Franciscans since 2003. "I struggle," he said, "but I have made my commitment to the Franciscan order and I will stick with it. The friars have embraced me and I have a home among them."

Some of his pieces are criticized for using the traditional Orthodox art form to portray people who not only aren't canonized saints, but aren't Christian. That is part of the apparent contradiction of Brother Robert. By some he is seen as a liberal, for painting Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day, Harvey Milk—one of the first openly gay public officials in the U.S.—scientist Albert Einstein, an Apache Christ, and a Navajo Madonna. But his icons revered by more conservative Christians—such as St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who had divine visions, and Mary, the mother of Jesus—are hugely popular as well.

CRITICS' OPINIONS ASIDE, Brother Robert takes quite seriously any variations he has made in the classical icon form he learned at Holy Transfiguration. "People accuse me of all sorts of things," he said. "But any change I've made to the art of icons has been painful for me."



"I'm not being rebellious, but I want to be theologically just."

Surprisingly, his first difficult request to paint someone outside the iconographic tradition came more than three decades ago when he was asked to paint Martin Luther King Jr. At that time, still active in the Orthodox Church, he said, "my ecclesiology didn't include Protestants as saints. Thirty-two years ago I was not willing to paint him." But then "I had the good fortune of having a Roman Catholic friend in San Francisco, Daniel O'Connor, who ran an urban retreat for the marginalized, people who were gay, divorced, or otherwise at odds with organized religion.

"He became my friend, and dialoguing with him—and getting to know the

people who came to the retreat center—helped me to stretch my reality."

A subsequent challenge came over whether to paint Gandhi, a Hindu. Brother Robert said he was influenced by missiologist Robert Schneider, a retired faculty member at Berea College, and by Orthodox Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, a noted theologian, in coming to think of the "kingdom of God" in larger terms than just the followers of Christ who formally belong to the Christian faith. At the moment of the resurrection, Lentz explained, Christ became head of the "body of Christ"—the entire people of God—whether or not those people think of themselves as followers of Jesus. He considers Rumi, Gandhi, and some other non-Christians as simply a part of "the kingdom."

"I'm not being rebellious [in who he portrays as icons], but I want to be theologically just. Gandhi and all the others are members of the body of Christ, even though they are outside the church."

Now, part of Brother Robert's ministry among the Franciscans is to mentor a new generation that wants to learn the art of making icons. His latest protégé, Michael Reyes, will soon be making his solemn vows, putting him on track for ordination as a priest.

"I expect great things from him," he said of Brother Michael. "He has come to an understanding of what sacred art is all about." ■

Patricia Zapor is a journalist who lives near Washington, D.C.



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Pope Francis cradles 8-year-old Dominic Gondreau, who has cerebral palsy, in St. Peter's Square, Easter Sunday, 2013.





No Longer the 'Best Kept Secret'

Pope Francis is bringing renewed attention to Catholic social teaching—and not only for Catholics.

SINCE HIS ELECTION as the 265th successor of St. Peter, Pope Francis has provided a refresher course on Catholic social teaching to the world's 1.2 billion Catholics. "Catholic social teaching is no longer a secret," says Jean Hill, director of peace and justice for the diocese of Salt Lake City. "Everything Pope Francis is saying comes from social doctrine and is about social justice."

Through his various homilies, speeches, and meetings, Francis is "reading the signs of the times" and making practical application to the issues of the day. Some of his most powerful statements to date were made in his first pastoral document, "The Joy of the Gospel," including this declaration: "I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church that is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."

Pope Francis is calling the faithful to be more merciful, compassionate, joyful, and centered upon the needs of the poor and vulnerable. He wants a church that sees the human person before the law and one that does not "obsess" about a narrow set of issues, but affirms both human life and human dignity. He invites

Gregorio Borgia/AP

Social teaching is a common ground where people of various faiths can come together to promote the common good.

Catholics to pray, reflect, and embrace the beauty and breadth of Catholic social teaching—a rich tradition that is predicated on the dignity of the human person.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) defines Catholic social teaching as “a central and essential element of our faith. Its roots are in the Hebrew prophets who announced God’s special love for the poor and called God’s people to a covenant of love and justice.” This teaching is also founded on the life and words of Jesus. It posits that “every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and therefore is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family.”

For Catholics and people of other faiths, this teaching matters because it can serve as a moral compass that provides guidance for addressing contemporary issues, such as domestic and global poverty, abortion, the death penalty, immigration, health care, human trafficking, and the environment. The moral dimensions of this teaching provide hope and inspiration to a world that has too often become cynical, disillusioned, and alienated. Finally, such teaching can function as a common ground upon which people of various faiths can come together to promote the common good of our society.

This social tradition is best summarized by seven principles or themes, as illustrated by Pope Francis’ teachings:

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person

“A human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. ... It is also true that we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish, especially when the life developing within them is the result of rape or a situation of extreme poverty.”

2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

“Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon, and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you!”

3. Rights and Responsibilities

“Today we also have to say ‘thou shall not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?”

4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

“Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and the promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. ... They have much to teach us.”

5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

“Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work, to use an image, ‘anoints’ us with dignity, fills us with dignity, [and] makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts.”

6. Solidarity

“We all have a responsibility to act so that the world may be a community of brothers [and sisters] who respect each other, who accept their diversity, and who take care of one another.”

7. Care for God’s Creation

“We are losing the attitude of wonder, contemplation, listening to creation. The implications of living in a horizontal manner [are] that we have moved away from God.”

ONE PRACTICAL tool to help operationalize these principles is what is known as the pastoral cycle, developed by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, SJ. This process incorporates four fundamental questions for parish groups, congregations, and other faith-based organizations: What is happening? Why is it happening? How shall we respond? What does it mean?

The pastoral cycle also includes the following steps:

1. Experience: This initial stage of the cycle requires a description of the problem. What

is the lived experience? Are we listening to the people most directly impacted by the issue?

2. Social Analysis: At this stage, congregations or community organizations investigate the reality of the problem or issue. What are the political, economic, cultural, and historical roots of the issue? Social analysis also assesses the consequences of certain actions and identifies the key decision-makers who have the power to change the problem or issue.

3. Theological Reflection: This entails reflecting on the issue in the light of the gospel and church teaching. Are gospel values being upheld? How do the scriptures and principles of Catholic social teaching speak to the issue? Can the experience of the Christian community over time aid us in discerning a response?

4. Response: Our response draws on human knowledge and tradition. What is the proper action for our parish, congregation, nonprofit, coalition, or community organization? Does it entail advocacy and social change, the establishment of services for the poor or marginalized, further faith formation, and/or awareness-raising?

Many of the faith-based groups funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)—the USCCB’s domestic antipoverty program—use some form of this practice in their advocacy or campaigns. In 2013, CCHD gave 214 grants totaling \$9 million to groups working to organize farmworkers, reform payday lending, establish credit unions, and create housing alternatives, among other things. CCHD embodies a Catholic principle known as subsidiarity—the belief that those directly impacted by unjust systems and structures have the best insight into knowing how to change them.

IN HIS SIMPLE manner, Pope Francis is having a profound impact on those doing the work of social justice education and advocacy around the nation. In my conversations with several local and national leaders, it’s clear that Francis has inspired,

Continued on Page 38

Why I Stay in the Church

A testament of irrational faith and quiet, gracious miracles • by BRIAN DOYLE

A QUESTION ASKED of me 100 times in the last 10 years: Why do you stay in the Catholic Church? How can you stay in a church where thousands of children were raped around the world? Where men in power covered their ears to the screams of children and moved the rapists around from parish to parish so that smiling welcoming parents presented their awed shy children to the rapists like fresh meat? Where women have been marginalized and sidelined for centuries and their incredible creativity diluted and wasted and left to rot? Where power and greed and cowardice so often trumped the very humility and mercy and defiant belief in the primacy of love on which the church was founded and for which it claims to stand today?

Because, I said haltingly, in the beginning, when I was unsure of my honest answer in the face of such rapacious crime and breathtaking lies, because, because ... because how could I quit now? What sort of rat leaves the ship when it is foundering and your fellow passengers need help? Why would I quit now, of all the times to quit? How could I leave the ship in the hands of the men who nearly sank her? How could I abandon the brave honest mothers and priests and nuns and teachers and bishops and dads and monks and children who are the church, who compose the church, who sing the deepest holiest song of the real church?

Because, I said more and more energetically as the years went by, because there are men like my archbishop in my church, men who stood up to lies and crime and accepted the lash of public insult without a word, though the sins were not theirs.

Because there are people like my mom and dad in my church, who refuse to let the sweet wild idea of the church

die in their souls or their lives or their parish, and refuse to let someone else define the church they know to be a continual verb, and endless possibility, the most revolutionary idea in the history of human beings, not merely a noun, a castle, a council of cassocks.

Because there are men like my pastor in my church, who poked his head into 10,000 hospital rooms and asked if he could help, who blessed 100 children as they arrived in this world, who blessed 1,000 souls as they stared at him starving for hope in their last moments on earth; and he closed their



eyes, after they were dead, and bowed his head, and prayed to the Lord that he was right to say they would feel his love soon like a home.

Because there are women like Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa and Annie Dillard in my church, tough flinty brilliant women who know that you pray by what you do, not by what you say or shout.

Because there are men like Joseph Bernardin in my church, who insisted gently and persistently all his life that life was holy, period, and that the lives of unborn children are the same weight of holiness as the lives of born children and young soldiers and grizzled prisoners, none of whom can be murdered without sinning against the first law of the One who breathed all things into being and to Whom all

things return when their days are done.

Because there are millions of quiet gracious miracles and saints in my church who conduct their lives as agents of love and hope and mercy against all sense and reason, which is the point of the Catholic church, and always was, and God willing always will be, if we stand together and hold hands and stop fussing about power and real estate and edicts and remember that our charge from the thin astonishing rabbi was to be arrows of love and hope and mercy against the epic tide of rage and despair and cruelty.

Why do I stay? How the hell could I go? To quit now would be logical, understandable, comprehensible, sensible; what reasonable person could stay amid such a shabby mess?

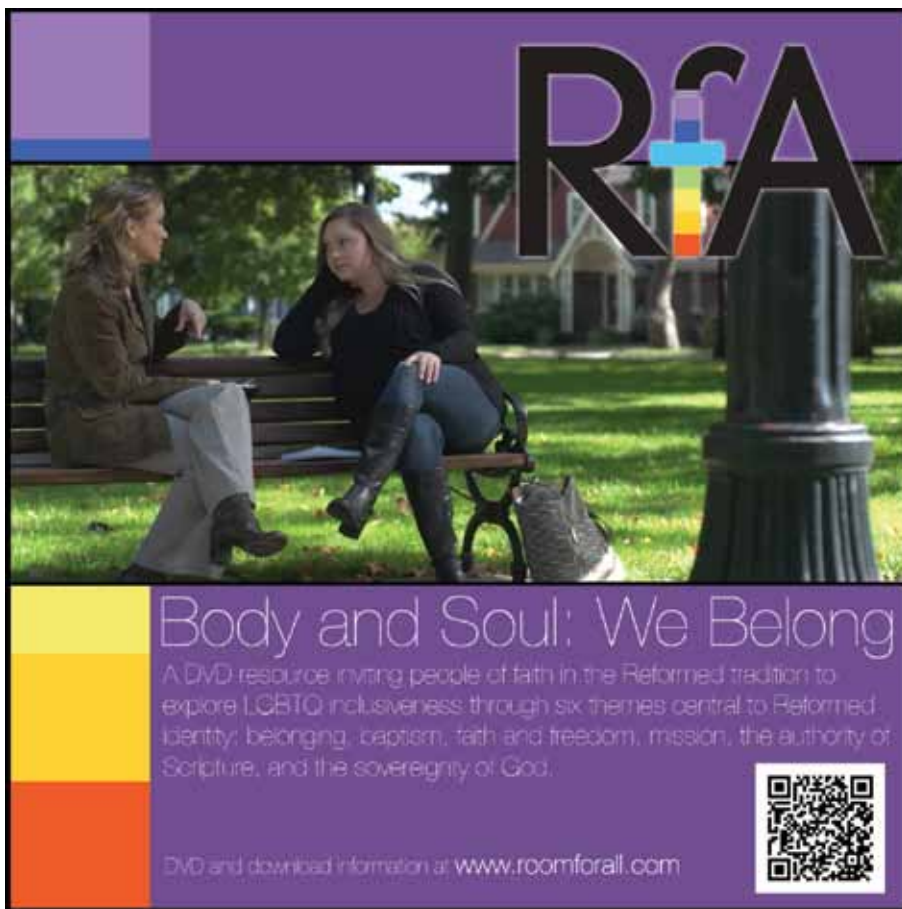
But it's never been about reason and logic and sense. It's about what's unbelievable, ridiculous, incomprehensible. It's about insisting on life against death, light against darkness, hope against despair. It's about faith in what can never be proven or understood or controlled. It's about believing that human beings can grow past violence and greed toward something more amazing than we could ever understand, if we keep faith in each other and in the message we were left by the gaunt rabbi, many years ago.

Why do I stay? Where would I go, that makes so little sense, that is so patently foolish, that could heal the bruised and bloody world, that could make a galaxy so crammed with light that it makes even its weary Maker smile, after all his work, that his children finally rose to their best selves, and sent their sins wailing and gnashing into the limitless dark? ■

Brian Doyle is the editor of Portland Magazine at the University of Portland (Oregon) and the author most recently of The Thorny Grace of It, a collection of spiritual essays.

It's about insisting
on life against
death, light against
darkness, hope
against despair.

Elizabeth Weinberg/Getty Images



RfA

Body and Soul: We Belong

A DVD resource inviting people of faith in the Reformed tradition to explore LGBTQ inclusiveness through six themes central to Reformed identity: belonging, baptism, faith and freedom, mission, the authority of Scripture, and the sovereignty of God.

DVD and download information at www.roomforall.com

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animated, re-energized, affirmed, and revived the challenging work they do. The consensus is that both John Paul II and Benedict XVI substantively advanced the church's social teaching; however, Francis is reaching audiences like no one before him.

Brian Corbin has served the diocese of Youngstown, Ohio, for 27 years as director of Catholic Charities and a leader in social action. He incorporates Francis' teaching

The moral dimensions provide hope and inspiration to a world that has become cynical, disillusioned, and alienated.

in board and staff training, as well as in a course on peacebuilding. He also promotes the "One Human Family: Food for All Campaign," a worldwide campaign to end hunger by 2025, as a framework for working on local, state, and national issues of food insecurity. The Food for All Campaign was initiated by Caritas Internationalis and launched by the pope in December 2013.

Corbin was successful in urging colleagues at the Catholic Conference of Ohio to join the campaign. According to Jim Tobin, associate director of the CCO, "There is an excitement about the pope. He gets his hands dirty, and we are in need of new energy."

In the archdiocese of Kansas City, Mo., Jude Huntz, who heads the human rights office, believes that Francis is inspiring parish interest in JustFaith, a program that seeks to transform people and expand their commitment to social ministry. Huntz recently hosted Jack Jezreel, director of JustFaith, who spoke about Pope Francis, social justice, and parish renewal.

Huntz was instrumental in inviting Archbishop Francis A. Chalikatt, apostolic nuncio and permanent observer of the Holy See at the United Nations, to speak to the annual roundtable conference about the "Joy of the Gospel." The archbishop had

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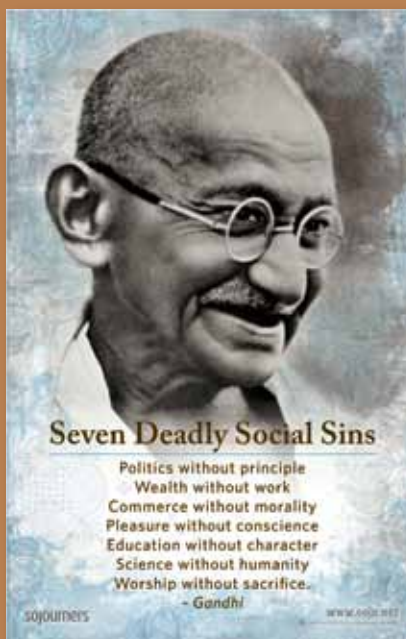
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Short Takes

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR...

previously visited Kansas City to assist the diocese in its opposition to the construction of a nuclear weapons plant in the region. According to Pat O'Bryan, chair of the roundtable, the speech by the archbishop was met with five standing ovations from the 600 social ministry attendees and was "an affirmation of who we are." O'Bryan added, "Pope Francis has awakened in me the spirit and empowerment of the Second Vatican Council. All of us have the ability and right as Catholic citizens to be active doers and participants in the community."

O'Bryan works closely with Sister Kathleen Ryan, SND, the social action director in Cleveland. Sister Ryan says her staff is revitalizing its Sowers of Justice leadership program for parishioners to better reflect the "Joy of the Gospel." Since Francis has spoken eloquently about the problem of human trafficking, the 20 schools who have covenanted as "Catholic Schools for Peace and Justice" will focus their 2015 conference on that issue.

Mat Catto directs the office of life, justice, and peace for the archdiocese of Portland, Ore. In April, his office sponsored a parish social ministry regional conference titled "Opening a Horizon of Hope: Transformed by Christ to Love All." The workshops included sessions on fair trade, poverty, and economic inequality. Each session was inspired by a quote from Pope Francis.

In the diocese of Little Rock, Ark., where Tom Navin serves as social action director, Catholics are only a small percentage of the overall population. Navin often works in coalition with other faith communities to enhance the influence of his office on issues such as prison ministry. He frequently hears his non-Catholic friends enthusiastically say, "Did you hear what Francis said today?"

In listening to the stories of those who toil for peace and justice, there is new energy and fresh air being breathed into Catholic social teaching. As Navin affirms, "Seeing Francis at work gives me the feeling that I am at the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing." ■

Tom Allio is the retired senior director of the social action office of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.



Nathan Brougher

Katerina Friesen

Bio: Katerina Friesen is studying theology and peace studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

1 How would you describe your current vocational role? I see my role as both revaluing what has been cast down and degraded and building resilient communities. So far this has taken shape through land-based ministries of farming and community gardening, inviting people to work together and celebrate the sacramental in soil, food, and one another.

2 You spent several years with the Abundant Table Farm Project in Santa Paula, Calif. Can you describe the project and your role there? The Abundant Table Farm Project is a working farm and young adult internship program that has evolved into a Christian community. I joined the project in 2009 and lived in community with four other women. My daily work of farming gave me a bodily understanding of farm workers' labor and the need for justice and wholeness in our incredibly disconnected food system.

3 What is unique to the theology of farming—particularly for women farmers? Women are growing in the field of agriculture in the U.S., especially at the margins of the industrial food system, and they're doing farming in a very different way. Many talk about their labor as a form of love. Their theology of love is not some abstract idea; it's an embodied force that feeds them in their struggle for justice, since their work brings them into tension with the dominant food system as well as with patriarchy. I think Jesus' incarnation challenges us to know love as

personal action for the restoration of life, as doing and not just being.

4 How do you define land-based ministry? How can it connect to larger issues in the church and world?

Every ministry is based on the land if it is located somewhere, but land-based ministry makes the land central to a vision of shalom for its particular place and community. The assumption is that the health of people and their environment are integrally connected, and the church can participate in reconnecting those ties that have been broken.

Farming and gardening are two main ways I've been involved in land-based ministries, but I don't think these are right for every context. Other ministries include ecological restoration projects, "rewilding" church properties, caring for the local watershed, providing free meals using produce from local farms or people's gardens, and community kitchens. Gleaning is another big one that is too often overlooked. The possibilities are really exciting.

5 What are you planting in your garden this season? I am so excited to be at a seminary with a campus community garden. I just bought seeds from a local farmer who is experimenting with varieties of legumes and grains. I also have some onions and kale that I'm trying to start by my window sill—not very successfully—and will soon be seeding sweet peas, beets, carrots, and chard.

—Interview by Rebecca Kraybill



Interview by Rebecca Kraybill

THE POWER TO **HEAL**

A conversation with writer and performer Daniel Beaty.

"I AM A STORYTELLER," says Daniel Beaty, "and my purpose in the world is to inspire people to transform pain to power."

He was first inspired to share his stories when his third-grade teacher showed a videotape of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Now as a writer, actor, singer, teacher, and motivational speaker, his storytelling is expressed in a dizzying array of different forms and outlets. The week in April that *Sojourners'* editorial assistant Rebecca Kraybill interviewed him, Beaty was doing daily performances in Los Angeles of a one-person play he wrote on the life of performer and activist Paul Robeson, "The Tallest Tree in the Forest" (in which he plays 40 characters and sings 14 songs) and, during the day, taping for a Ford Foundation-funded documentary on work he does with children of incarcerated parents.

This was just a fortnight after Beaty finished a six-week speaking tour in support of his memoir, *Transforming Pain to Power: Unlock Your Unlimited Potential* (Penguin-Random House). He's also the author of a children's book released in December 2013 by Little, Brown and Company, *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me*, with graphics by award-winning illustrator Bryan Collier, which is an adaptation

Don Ipock/La Jolla Light

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The Book of Forgiving



Daniel Beaty, playwright
 and star of 'The Tallest
 Tree in the Forest,'
 performing as Paul
 Robeson at the La Jolla
 Playhouse near San Diego.

of a poem Beaty wrote about his experience growing up with an incarcerated father. "Knock knock down the doors that I could not" is one especially poignant line the father in the book writes to the son; it carries a call to healing and liberation that is found in all of Beaty's work.

Kraybill talked with Beaty about the effects of mass incarceration on families, the power of a "theater sanctuary," and how the arts call us toward "the capacity to do better."

Rebecca Kraybill: Many people were first introduced to your work through a YouTube video of the Def Poetry Jam performance of your poem, "Knock Knock." What inspired that poem?

Daniel Beaty: My father has been a heroin addict for most of my life and was a heroin dealer at some point earlier in my life.

He's been in and out of prison 59 times. My father's incarceration and addiction at an earlier phase in my life caused me to believe certain things about myself and what my future could be. Much of my journey has been aligned to heal me around those feelings, to allow God to truly be a father to the fatherless. And to teach me that, through God's love, I could create any kind of life I wanted, regardless of the environment or the choices of certain people in my life.

When did writing first become a meaningful vehicle of healing for you?

I've been writing since I was very, very small. My mother actually found a sheet of my childhood handwriting on the notebook paper with the big lines you use when you're young. It said, "poetry," "music," and "drama." I also found a book of poetry that was one of my father's school books. It had his notes scribbled in the margins. My father, despite his addiction, was brilliant; he graduated summa cum laude in English from the University of Dayton. With him in prison, that book of poetry was a way that I felt connected to him.

What messages do you hope to convey in your children's book, *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me*?

Though my personal story was my father's incarceration and addiction, many children deal with loss for a variety of reasons, ranging from incarcerated parents, to death, to divorce, and beyond. I wanted to tell a story where parents have a tool to explain or discuss this idea of loss with their children, but not to stop there—to say, despite the absence of a parent, you still can create the most extraordinary life possible for yourself.

As one reviewer said, children's books are not just designed to reflect a child's experience. They're designed to open children up to experiences different than their own. There are 2.8 million children of incarcerated parents in this country; that means many children have a friend or a classmate whose parent is incarcerated or absent in some way.

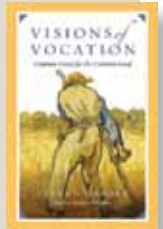
In *Transforming Pain to Power*, you write about the concept of an

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New & Noteworthy

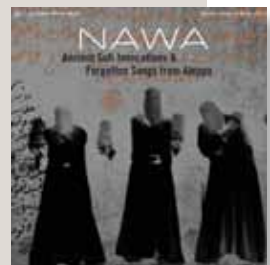
LIFE WITH PURPOSE

In *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*, Steven Garber writes eloquently of the challenge "to see with the eyes of the heart, to see oneself as responsible for the way the world is and isn't" without succumbing to cynicism. IVP Books



SAVED SONGS

Just months before civil war erupted in Syria, a small group of Syrian Sufi musicians known as NAWA were recorded performing nearly lost melodies, songs, and poems on *Ancient Sufi Invocations and Forgotten Songs from Aleppo*. This is the first album in a planned four-part Sacred Voices of Syria series. Electric Cowbell/Lost Origins



WORKERS SPEAK

The oral histories gathered in *Invisible Hands: Voices from the Global Economy*, compiled and edited by Corinne Gorla, give a too rare chance to hear from manual laborers around the world and learn of the dangers and abuse they face daily. Voice of Witness

PEACEFUL COURAGE

The historical novel *Jacob's Choice*, by Ervin R. Stutzman, follows Jacob Hochstetler, an Amish settler in the 1700s who endures the killing of family members and captivity in the midst of the French and Indian War, all putting his pacifist beliefs to the test. Based on actual events. Herald Press



The Future Isn't What It Used to Be

IN WALT DISNEY'S Tomorrowland, you still have to push the faucet to get water to wash your hands. I know this because I stood waving my soapy hands at the men's room spigot for about 15 seconds, expecting water to magically appear, as it so often does these days. Finally the guy next to me said, "You have to push it."

Still recovering from this irony, I left the men's room and noticed, along the wall outside, a deserted bank of AT&T pay phones. The future, it turns out, just isn't what it used to be, but then, at Disneyland, neither is the past.

It was a perfect blue, warm, sunny day in mid-April, Wednesday of Holy Week in fact, when I joined the cosmopolitan herd trekking from the Pinocchio parking lot to the gates of Disneyland—the original one, in California. But unlike the other middle-aged people there,

"See," we tell ourselves, "we were so good once. How bad could we really be?"

I went unencumbered by children, and I didn't pay \$92 to enter the kingdom of Mickey. My trip was a corporate junket related to my higher-ed day job. I was responsible for three college students, but they had their per diem and didn't need me, so I was free to wander, observe, and refuse to stand in those mile-long lines for the famous rides.

My first stop was on the faux turn-of-the-last-century Main Street, at "Market House." It looks like an old-time general store, with wide-plank hardwood floors and rough lumber pillars. But closer inspection reveals a Starbucks in disguise: the same pastries, sandwiches, and drinks as at any Starbucks the world over. But the ultimate Disney touch was the small army of young Latina baristas behind the counter in

floor-length, puffy-sleeved dresses straight out of *Little House on the Prairie*.

Market House is a perfect emblem of the Disneyland ethos. On Main Street, the imagined American past (complete with Disney's famous robotic Lincoln) serves as a sort of cultural Ambien, washing away the anxieties of postmodern life and easing us into a self-affirming dream land.

"See," we tell ourselves, "we were so good once. How bad could we really be?" Who wouldn't buy some of that?

All that goes double for Frontierland, where the Mark Twain riverboat plods along a green cement-bottomed "river," as it has for decades, into a past where there never were, and never will be, any slaves—and ditto for the Caribbean of Disney's famous pirates.

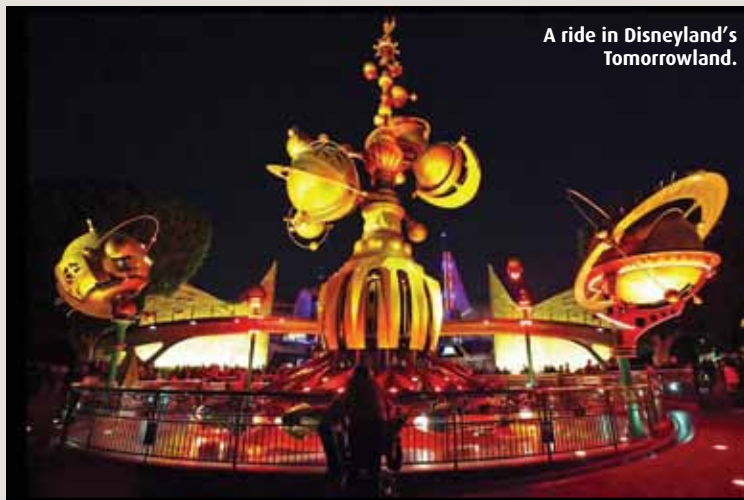
But the strangest trip out of time has to be Tomorrowland, where, in 2014, Disney's imagined future still looks a lot like the 1970s. You can see the Tomorrowland skyline from Main Street, and even at that distance, it's disorienting. There's a big replica of an Apollo-style rocket,

and a tower festooned with those enormous heavy, steel satellite dishes that even my rural Kentucky neighbors don't have anymore.

Despite the retro exterior, Tomorrowland contains some genuine glimpses of the future, most notably ASIMO, the robot developed by Honda. ASIMO (the name stands for Advanced Step in Innovative Mobility) is a cute little thing, shiny white, a little over 4 feet tall. Its coordination, agility, and artificial intelligence are pretty impressive. In the Disneyland demo ASIMO is functioning as a domestic servant, but its mistress does suggest that it could prove useful doing other work that is too dangerous for humans. Maybe it could clean up that nuclear power plant in Japan, the one that's still simmering more than three years after the tsunami.

And, by the way, does anyone else remember when the peaceful atom was someday going to cleanly and cheaply light up our lives? Seems like that future is past, too, even at Disneyland. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



A ride in Disneyland's Tomorrowland.

Wikimedia Commons

Continued from Page 41

authentic self—how would you describe this concept?

Personally, as a Christian, as a believer, for me the authentic self is synonymous with the Holy Spirit, the presence of God within. In God's enabling grace, that's the deepest part of us that is powerful: It can achieve, accomplish, heal, anything challenging that shows up in our lives. Unfortunately, many people have been abused by their church experience or are hesitant to identify with Christian concepts. So in the process of writing *Transforming Pain to Power*, this [nonsectarian concept] of the authentic self came to me. It's a place of safety inside ourselves that allows us to not get lost in the barrage of negative thoughts and feelings that often shows up in our lives, but to connect to a deeper part of ourselves, so that we can still be empowered.

What projects are you working on now that especially fuel your passions?

We're doing a documentary to highlight the impact of mass incarceration on children and families. I also do a lot of work within communities using the tools of storytelling to help young people heal trauma. I'm doing work in Watts, Calif., which is where the Crips and the Bloods, and a lot of gang violence, were first rooted—as well as scaling that work to other cities around the country, including Boston and Omaha.

Given your experience as a child of an incarcerated parent, what changes do you think need to happen in our prison system?

One, we have to focus much more on transformative or restorative justice. What kind of people are we being if we see people commit a crime—which is often committed out of some type of need, pain, or systematic inequity—if we don't then create a space where people can be transformed or restored to their best selves during incarceration?

In terms of the system, mass incarceration is such a corporate proposition right now. There needs to be real rigor in terms of policies, and in terms of media really highlighting the systematic injustice of mass incarceration, the outdated drug laws, who's profiting, and who's being incarcerated, and



Scarlett Johansson in *Under the Skin*.

VIEWING COMMUNITY

THERE ARE apparently 2,000 film festivals around the world, so the format of red carpet arrivals, gala screenings, and Q&A sessions that appear all but scripted in advance have become well and truly entrenched. The best festivals recognize that their purpose is to cast a spell over filmgoers and filmmakers alike, inviting them into a spacious place where the heart of the dream that led to the film being made and the audience's reason for watching it can beat in a community of people who thirst for art that gives life. Unsurprisingly, the biggest festivals find it hardest to pull this off—asking for contemplative mutuality at Cannes or Sundance is like looking for a Buddhist tea garden at Disney World.

Yet film festivals can be places where small is indeed beautiful. It's only the movies that need to be big—or at least their capacity to alchemize with the viewer's autobiographical narrative. The trappings of VIP lounges, paparazzi, and celebrity gossip are just that: They trap the aesthetic air, creating distance between people and art. Smaller festivals may be more capable of nurturing something that really feels like community.

So when at North Carolina's Full Frame Documentary Film Festival this spring we watched *Visitors*, Godfrey Reggio's follow-up to his epochal Qatsi trilogy, and the diverse faces of human beings segued into natural landscape and a Louisiana cemetery, the sense of

empathic connection with an artist who spent the first 14 years of his life in New Orleans and the next 14 as a Christian Brothers monk was palpable. The impossible-to-categorize musician Nick Cave portrayed a sly version of himself in the pseudo-documentary **20,000 Days on Earth**, intercutting concert footage with a role-played therapy session, visits with friends, and a neo-noir road trip, to moving effect. And the gay rights courtroom drama of **The Case Against 8** played to an audience of citizens whose state had adopted a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage; the showing led to near-euphoric anticipation of how a better history can reverse this tide.

At film festivals, because we're all living together for a few days, people let their guard down. You hear more audible weeping at festivals than in regular multiplex viewing. I wish I had seen **Locke** and **Under the Skin** at festivals—these are two of the year's best films, each about solo protagonists struggling to find a more humane way to live amid the challenge of the powers that be. If those protagonists showed up at a multiplex, we might not notice. Among the gathered community of the better film festival world, they'd belong. ■

Gareth Higgins is a northern Irish writer based in North Carolina. His book Cinematic States: America in 50 Movies is available from www.cinematicstates.com.

things like “stop and frisk.” It’s a hugely out-of-balance system.

How do you find hope as you work on this issue?

One of the reasons why I’m doing this documentary on children of incarcerated parents is I want people to see firsthand the emotional impact that mass incarceration has on children and families. People might think that since a person committed a crime, he or she deserves to be punished. But when you look at children, then you start to have a conversation: Oh, that family has been broken, or the next generation is hurting because of something that they’re not responsible for. We begin to ask ourselves, what kind of nation are we creating with some of these fatherless/motherless children?

Media, television, and film are seriously powerful socializing tools. We normalized incarcerating so many of our brothers and sisters. But when we start to show images of the real impact of mass incarceration, we realize that it’s not normal—it’s actually inhumane. I believe people care. But sometimes we have to be reminded of the best of who we are and our capacity to do better.

How have you experienced the power of transformation through the theater?

Theater is almost like a sanctuary. It’s one of the few places, other than church, where people gather to have an experience as a community. One person, in the case of a solo show, or a group of people, in the case of an ensemble play or a musical, stand before a group to lead them into that experience, to provoke them to think, often to uplift and inspire them. In a world with so much technology, it’s vital to have the dramatic arts to remind us of that special energy that can exist between people in live performance.

One of the biggest messages I try to communicate in *Transforming Pain to Power* is that we first must get present to our pain and ultimately transform it by asking ourselves: What can I do? What can I contribute to others, contribute to the world? In the process of being a storyteller, and certainly in my live performances, I have the hope of transforming my audience in some way, but I’m also transformed in the act of the sharing. We’re all wounded healers. As we share our stories, we help others heal. I think God heals us. ■



Daniel Grill/Getty Images

Reviewed by Ryan Herring

BREAKING DOWN THE INVISIBLE WALLS

Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart,
by Christena Cleveland. IVP Books.

OVER THE PAST 2,000 years, Christians have found myriad ways to divide the body of Christ. We are now more divided than ever, with more than 40,000 Christian denominations worldwide. Perhaps, in this context, we are asking the wrong questions. Do we really understand God’s desire for the church to be one? Do we as individuals have a yearning for the unification of the body of Christ? Why do we create the divisions we create? Why do we maintain the divisions that already exist? How can we break through these barriers to heal a broken church?

Christena Cleveland sets out to answer all of these questions and more in her latest book, *Disunity in Christ*. Cleveland is a young, energetic, and brilliant teacher, speaker, and researcher in the fields of social

a “right Christian” or “wrong Christian.” The reader is immediately able to connect with her and realize the ways in which we have created division in our own lives, whether because of race, gender, orientation, education, location, socio-economic status, theology, or political affiliation. It also becomes apparent why we prefer our homogenous groups.

My, what a mess we have made. Most of these prejudices and biases are obvious to us. We are usually aware that we hold them and use them to separate us from people who may be different than us. However, there are also hidden forces that create divisions. This is where *Disunity in Christ* offers unique insight. According to Cleveland, “many of the processes that create and maintain cultural divisions in the church occur outside of our

“Many of the processes that maintain cultural divisions in the church occur outside of our awareness.”

psychology and faith and reconciliation. For those concerned with reconciliation in the church, which should be all of us, hers is a voice to take seriously.

In *Disunity*, Cleveland quickly breaks the ice by poking fun at herself and by pointing to her own personal prejudices and biases that have led to her categorically labeling fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as either

awareness.” Using her training as a social psychologist, she dives right into them, creating valuable perspective and providing the reader with a foundational understanding of social psychology, and why it is useful to the church.

Thankfully, Cleveland does not leave us there. Through our cultural prejudices and biases, many of us have become experts at identifying problems without offering any

solutions. Cleveland wants us to engage in building bridges and dismantling the existing divisions as soon as we put the book down. In the closing chapters she equips the reader with tools for the work of reconciliation. She provides us with a biblical foundation for cross-cultural unity and explains how to overcome our cognitive and emotional biases.

As a young, black Christian from Baltimore who grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal tradition, I have always loved and taken a lot of pride in my culture. Recently, I was thrown into the (white) evangelical world. I felt like Daniel in the lion's

den. I felt attacked and unsafe outside my homogenous group. It was second nature to identify how I was not like "them" and how "they" were not like me. I know God has called me, just like God has called other Christians in similar situations, not to retreat into a safe haven but to take on the uncomfortable task of working toward unity. *Disunity in Christ* is not only a source of education, but is also a source of hope that the work of reconciliation is possible, necessary, and not done in vain. ■

Ryan Herring is the marketing and circulation assistant at *Sojourners*.

Reviewed by Brittany Shoot

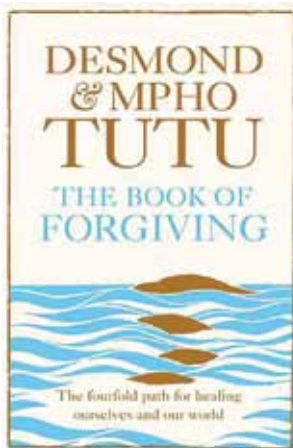
LETTING GO—AND ITS **COMPLICATIONS**

The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World, by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu. HarperOne.

FORGIVENESS IS wholeness, Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his daughter, Anglican minister Rev. Mpho Tutu, write in their newest collaboration, *The Book of Forgiving*. Scientific research shows that forgiveness has the power to transform us in spiritual, emotional, and even physical ways. That evidence is paired with the Tutus' collective experience in counseling, studying, and teaching and their personal stories about the difficulty of forgiving. Archbishop Tutu writes about learning to forgive his abusive father. Mpho, who writes about learning to forgive the man who murdered her housekeeper in her home, is pursuing a PhD in the topic of forgiveness.

The book lays out some simple but critical truths: Everyone can be forgiven.

Everyone deserves forgiveness. You must be willing to forgive. Forgiveness is not a weakness, nor a luxury. Forgiving others is a way to practice forgiving yourself. Through forgiveness, we all become whole again. Unconditional forgiveness is an act of grace that frees all parties from further indignity, and from self-blame and corrosive hatred.



The path to forgiveness seems simple enough when you can navigate it in four easy-to-follow steps: Tell the story. Name the hurt. Grant forgiveness. Renew or release the relationship. The path is also—sorry—a bit pedestrian. That doesn't mean the route map isn't useful. But the book will be most applicable if you have struggled to forgive or feel that even contemplating forgiveness is an impossible burden weighing heavy on your heart and soul. If you're carrying a load you can't seem to gracefully shrug off or leave by the side of the road, the Tutus can help you chart the course.

The book is less clear on why anyone would be so immobilized and confounded by everyday anger and resentment, and how forgiveness is inextricably tied with learning to be vulnerable. The book is filled with outsized examples of forgiveness between neighbors after a civil war and between assault victims and rapists. Those stories sometimes overshadow more commonplace situations: family squabbles, workplace conflicts, and random acts of violence. Harboring

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resentment toward a distant relative, for instance, bears little resemblance to forgiving a rapist. "Let us condemn ghastly acts, but let us never relinquish the hope that the doers of the most heinous deeds can and may change," writes Archbishop Tutu, urging us to cultivate hope in any situation that requires pardon.

Hope bolsters us in times of doubt and confusion. But throughout the book, forgiveness is conflated with letting go and moving on. If forgiveness is healing, as the Tutus write, I repeatedly wondered: What is forgiveness without humility and contrition? Are we living in a radical, post-penance world? Why do we, fallible egotists, get to decide who should be forgiven? What does our forgiveness offer someone with intentional malice if the offender isn't sorry or aware of the impact of his or her actions?

We can forgive someone without actively telling them so. But just because you're able to forgive, for example, an estranged, abusive family member doesn't mean you should rekindle that relationship if there's been no behavior change. The Tutus seem to disregard that there's no health benefit in seeking out toxic relationships, or subjecting yourself to further mistreatment. There's a difference between holding a grudge and practicing hopeful compassion while making peace in your own private way and getting on with your life.

To the delight of book club devotees, and certainly useful for those seeking specific action steps, *The Book of Forgiving* is ready-made for group study or personal use. Each chapter ends with a summary, suggested journaling exercises, and sample meditations such as a "finger labyrinth," a small drawing of a maze you can trace with your finger.

Archbishop Tutu notes, "The quality of human life on our planet is nothing more than the sum total of our daily interactions with one another." Forgiveness can transform our lives, changing our role from victim to hero. What should never be side-stepped is the deeply personal nature of forgiveness, and that one solution set may never be applicable to all. ■

Brittany Shoot is a Sojourners contributing writer.

Reviewed by Donna Schaper

MAY OUR TWEETS RISE
UP LIKE INCENSE

From the Psalms to the Cloud:
Connecting to the Digital Age,
by Maria Mankin and Maren C. Tirabassi.
Pilgrim Press.

YOU DON'T HAVE

to be an environmentalist to wonder about technology. Will it be our great savior or another thorn in the flesh, another opportunity to hear Thoreau's lament about the tendency of humans to "become the tools of their tools"?

This excellent collection of prayers and worship materials, *From the Psalms to the Cloud*, helps us understand the tool of technology. It is a very green book while also being useful. It is green because it gives us a way out of the totalitarian world of the market and into a world that we make with words.

Just about everybody is on the other side of the "time famine" and the "trust famine" and deep into digital and connectivity overload. By time famine I mean the pervasive sense that there is not enough time to do what we want, so subjugated is our time to technology, forms, and robotic requests for information. By trust famine I mean all that time we spend worrying about time and wondering if somebody else is in charge. Are we in charge of our tools and our time or are our tools and time in charge of us?

In this optimistic book, the prophets arrive. Mankin and Tirabassi ask the right question: Can a technology devoted to advertising be useful to spirituality? They answer with a careful yes, taking us on the long road from the Psalms to Twitter, by way of "vintage wine in vintage wineskins, uncorked." These two writers gather the wisdom of dozens of beautiful writers of prayers and liturgies and show us a way to go deep digitally. Whether they are praying



for energy that will “deeply change all of our clocks,” or for the return of the time when churches giving sanctuary for immigrants will become again “dusty places with pews,” or in any of John Dannon’s exquisite doxologies for the natural and ecclesiastical seasons, or encouraging us to “spend a day saying nothing that doesn’t need saying.” The prayer topics move through addiction to pregnancy to a ritual for quitting a job. What a great ask this is for those confused or overdone with technology: We pray “for a trap door when we hit rock bottom.”

Because this is a book of piety and prayer, it contrasts well to the multiple volumes of doom on the shelves. Contrast it to C.A. Bowers’ *The False Promises of the Digital Revolution*, which argues that there is nothing culturally neutral about technology. It reinforces our sense of progress as a cultural value, which is ecologically dangerous, especially if repeated around the world as though it was right

This excellent collection of prayers and worship materials helps us understand the tool of technology.

for everyone to over-consume. Bowers also laments that technology substitutes data for ancient forms of wisdom. *From the Psalms to the Cloud* is a wisdom book about technology, helping to challenge the culture of data.

Nothing can be as green as worshipping. We move off the road of consumption into another time and space. Nothing can be as green as technology, which keeps us out of our cars and connected virtually. Putting worshipping and technology together, carefully, is a great idea. Adding the theological training course is a mighty work. Thank you, authors: You deeply encourage me on the road to prayer. I am less the tool of my tools after reading your wisdom. ■

Donna Schaper is senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City.

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Dynasties and Birthrights

THE CHILDHOOD UNDERSTANDING of the familiar tune about climbing Jacob's ladder needs a reset. The Genesis narratives aren't just about heaven—they yield epiphanies into the ordinary life of faith. The household of Abraham and Sarah, even in its ancient context, is atypical. In family dynamics, without the miraculous moments, epiphanies subvert our expectations of whom and what God can utilize to reveal the faithfulness of divine promises. Sometimes the testimony is evident in ordinary lives—even ours. You've heard it said, "Our greatest weakness is our strength." The episodes in Jacob's life provide sufficient demonstrations of how passions both energize and blind us: Passion or anger; leadership or arrogance; emotion or intuition; determination or stubbornness.

Despite Jacob's inconsistencies, the second half of Genesis encompasses his story, as the son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham. Here we find an unfolding drama. Characters display human nature at its extremes: conniving relatives, loving couples; creative entrepreneurs, dishonest contractors. All, somehow, used by God to form a people with whom the Spirit so evidently abides.

Even when we go our own way, God's purposes are not thwarted. The challenge for the church in this Pentecost season is to trust that God is planting seeds in good soil—and the seeds that won't sprout also have a purpose in this garden. Remember that the actions of justice, grace, and faithfulness we practice at home are as much a witness to God as our public proclamations and protests.



Joy J. Moore is associate dean for African-American church studies and assistant professor of preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary in California.

[JULY 6]

'I Will Go,' Says Rebekah

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Psalm 145:8-14; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

AN ATTENTIVE READING of the family narrative in Genesis exposes recurrent behaviors characteristic of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even where expected patterns vary, the influence of the elder can be detected in the choices of the younger. We may profit by suspending some of our preconceived notions and, as the saying goes, reread the stories again for the first time.

So accustomed are we to reading scripture as dismissive of women—especially related to the possessive nature of ancient marriage—we can miss the multifaceted actions of Rebekah found in these Genesis passages, which recall the matchmaking for Isaac and Rebekah that takes place at the well. Her place in this family is not merely the serendipitous matchmaking encounter, nor the mutual love-at-first-sight shared between her and Isaac. In this woman, the narrative preserves the dauntless temperament of Abraham. Unlike his father, Isaac is acquiescent. The son of one who left the land of his ancestors, Isaac remains in his mother's home (Genesis 24:67). It is Rebekah who exercises Abraham's pattern of going forth.

She leaves the home of her father, solely on a promise. Directed toward the future, she responds, "I will go."

Her response does not prepare us for her later conniving with her son, Jacob, against her husband, Isaac, a family dynamic that is not without nuance within the households of Abraham and Sarah: think Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, and Joseph and his brothers. It is their ordinary life—family feuds, children who worship in the way of their fathers—that results in a witness to God's covenanting faithfulness. As Walter Brueggemann notes, such novelistic features provide for great storytelling: "In a culture which grasps for visible signs of faith, which is driven to scientism, and which falls for too many religious quackeries, this story stands as a foil against easy and mistaken faith."

The ordinariness of Jesus' "eating and drinking" life (Matthew 11:19), as opposed to the asceticism of John the Baptist, draws today's followers away from grand epiphanies and miraculous moments to glimpsing God's

grace in our mundane, muddled, day-to-day existence. Even when "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15), we pray that we, as works of God, shall praise the Lord and "speak of the glory" of God's reign (Psalm 145:10-11).

[JULY 13]

Sibling Rivalries

Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 65:1-13; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

SIBLING RIVALRY continues to produce tension in our world. Our relationship with our enemies can be as close as Jacob and Esau struggling in the womb. Yet the reality into which we are to be delivered demands the presence of all nations.

The promise has always been that both sons will be provided for. Yet even in the womb, the haste to control this gift is evident. Jacob, who will eventually preserve the promise, nonetheless wrestles all his life for it. Jacob is no different than Esau. The self-promotion for personal satisfaction remains a human frailty in the biblical narrative—from Cain and Abel to Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son—as if human striving can somehow manipulate divine intentions. While God responds to our prayers (see Genesis 25:23), the divine intention remains in play: a concern for partnership, rather than power.

With this echo, the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23) need be not only an evangelism strategy for reaching those outside the community of faith. Instead we might see two nations, both with access to the word of God's promises. Each has the opportunity to reap the blessing—it is the birthright of humanity. But one will despise the divine intention in pursuit of worldly wealth, wisdom, and welcome. Today's disciples are no more understanding than Jesus' first century followers. One would expect sown seeds to grow. But Jesus had to explain to the fishermen, more familiar with winds, the importance of good soil. Not a literal planting and sowing, but a metaphor for mutual support against secular temptations of fortune, foresight, and fame. The challenge of a Christian witness in the world may be to get our own house in order.

[JULY 20]

Crossed Paths

Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 86:11-17;
Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

JACOB'S DREAM journey between heaven and earth begins here at Bethel. Whether escaping the wrath of his brother Esau (Genesis 27:41-45) or returning to Paddan-aram, the land of his mother and grandfather, to find a wife (Genesis 27:46 to 28:1-5), Jacob leaves his father Isaac with a burden and a blessing. As the journey begins, we learn how God will shape Isaac's blessing for his son.

The reading this week is tamed by speculations that the placement of a rock at one's head means sleeping on it (as Elizabeth Achtemeier notes, at the very least he probably wrapped it with his cloak). Jacob's evening rest stop has become the meeting place of heaven and earth. Not merely a moment of confirmation that he is on the right track or in pursuit of success, Jacob is astounded to have crossed paths with God. And what comes after Jacob's vision is as important as his heavenly glimpse.

We know this story because Jacob marked the spot of his encounter with God. God is not present because Jacob marked the spot. Jacob marked the spot because God was present. We mark births, deaths, anniversaries, and graduations. Yet we rarely mark public places where we taste heaven on earth. We construct buildings and invite God in, but on the occasion of life-transforming moments too often we neglect to name God as present.

Disaster, devastation, and disappointment evoke the question "Why is God doing this?" But when good happens, our "thank-you-God" shout-outs mirror the cheers of a running back after a touchdown. However, a bowl-game goalpost dance does not evoke remembrance of the Covenanting God at work. We are simply in awe of the player.

In a culture that believes we can have good without God and justice without Jesus, Christians must explicitly subject these ideas to the claims of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. Like Jacob, we must point to the glimpses of heaven that occur within the ordinary. This is how we witness to heaven on earth.

[JULY 27]

Order My Steps, Lord

Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 119:129-136;
Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

WAS LABAN SO wrong—ensuring the honor of Leah, his firstborn daughter, by giving her in marriage to Jacob before the younger, Rachel (Genesis 29:15-28)? At the time, the primogeniture laws of the firstborn to inherit were the linchpin of the socioeconomic system, as Walter Brueggemann reminds. As with most readings of the text as scripture, these episodes expose human frailty in the hands of a faithful God. Not to be missed in this passage is the echo that Jacob never seemed to rightly grasp the cultural traditions regarding the firstborn. But his uncle Laban does. There is conniving and misdirection on all sides. "Jacob is a scandalous challenge to his world," write Brueggemann, "because the God who calls him is also scandalous." Without correcting the ancient practices of giving a woman in marriage and other gender inequities contemporary customs redress, might this story enable us to picture the irony of judging the promise of a person at first glance?

The Matthew reading places in Jesus' words a similar caution about judging too swiftly. Deciding who is in or out remains a risky endeavor. "The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous," he preaches (13:49). The witness to salvation tells us this is the role of God, not us.

Jacob's action suggests that in Rachel he has found his "one pearl of great value." Yet it is Leah who effects change, like unseen leaven. It is Leah who will mother the children that lead to David, Moses, and Jesus. As Elizabeth Achtemeier tells us, "God takes a distasteful situation and turns it into a cause of blessing." Jacob didn't protest or withdraw from Laban's trick to get him to marry Leah. Instead, Jacob worked diligently within the bounds of an unfair arrangement. In the end, the swindled swindler came out ahead. Such a reading enables us to truly sing Glenn Edward Burleigh's beautiful hymn, "Please, order my steps in your word" (119:133). ■

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They've Got Your Number...

I'VE BEEN SPENDING a lot of time with my credit card company lately. Nice people work there, of course, and I try to make every phone call a time of conviviality and respect. It's what good people do.

Credit card guy: Sir, my name is Brian, and ...

Me: No, it's not.

"Brian": I beg your pardon?

Me: Be honest. They give you Anglicized names to sound more

Don't get me wrong. I'm all for buying an iPad or any of the high-tech gadgets that I've had my eye on. And I totally get that the guy in Kansas feels the same way. In fact, I was cool with him right up to the point where he decided to keep it for himself.

Fortunately, I wasn't charged. (Note to guy in Kansas: Next time buy two, and call me.) As a result, Brian sent me a Visa card with a different number.

It felt like a new beginning for me, a fresh start in a life that has few do-overs. It was a moment for celebration so, giddy with excitement, I took my new card and bought something from Target.

Bad idea. On the day Target had one of the largest data breaches in U.S. corporate history, I had to buy a toothbrush. (In my defense, it's a Sonicare, which leaves my teeth clean and fresh and, as a bonus, emits a high-pitched sound that shuts up the neighbor's little yappy dogs for a blissful few minutes.)

A couple weeks later, the credit card company called again, although it wasn't Brian. (I miss him already.) After a brief discussion as to why I was purchasing hundreds of dollars of money orders on-line—which I wasn't—they sent me another credit card. This one came with a little silver square that's supposed to better thwart illegal use. How it will do this I don't know, but since it appears to contain radioactive material maybe it creates some kind of nuclear shield

around me. Seems dangerous, but I trust credit card companies. When have they ever steered us wrong?

Ken Davis

THE TECHNICAL term of my misfortune is credit card fraud, part of the wider phenomenon known as identity theft, which is the natural outgrowth of people no longer getting to know each other in the conventional way, such as having a nice lunch together. Instead, these days people just grab your Facebook profile, cross reference it through stolen Social Security numbers, then merge it with vulnerable credit card data and just like that, they think they know you.

No phone calls on a lazy Sunday afternoon. No birthday greetings, no thank you notes for the iPad they just purchased on your behalf.

What ever happened to *relationships*? It's as if human contact is being reduced to a series of numbers on a computer screen. Although, if one of those numbers belongs to your bank account, you can be sure some guy in Eastern Europe will want to be your new Facebook friend. So maybe it's not all bad. (But don't try to stop by for a visit. He moves a lot.)

When it comes to your credit card number, however, *never* reveal that to *anyone*, even if it's a really cool number like mine: 4128-8736-6023-2003. It has a nice rhythm to it, don't you think? ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

And they're using it for themselves.

American, right? So when did you get that name?

"Brian": When I was born. It's also my father's name.

Me: And, you're calling from, like, Mumbai or ...

Brian: Texas.

Me: [awkward moment of silent self-loathing, mercifully cut short by seeing a butterfly. Pretty.]

But you readers understand my point. American jobs should be for Americans. Honest, God-fearing Americans who embody the spirit of freedom and entrepreneurship. Like the guy in Kansas who, according to Brian, had just purchased an iPad with my credit card number. Brian was calling from Texas to make sure this was okay with me, which it wasn't.

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